新妹魔王の契約者（テスタメント）

The Testament of Sister New Devil

II

上栖綴人

イラスト○大熊猫介
［ニトロプラス］

角川スニーカー文庫

●上栖綴人

今年の冬は寒いですね。皆さん体調など崩されていませんか？　しかし聞くところによると、体温を上げれば免疫力が上がるそうな。ならば「スニーカー史上初！　かなりHぃバトルアクション」の本作『新妹魔王の契約者』をどうぞ。読めばきっと体温が上がります。電車の中だとより効果的。もし満員電車の中で音読などすれば、それこそ効果は絶大です——ただし万一タイホされても当方は責任を取れませんので、自己責任でお願いします。

カバーイラスト／大熊猫介（ニトロプラス）
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新妹魔王の契約者（テスタメント）

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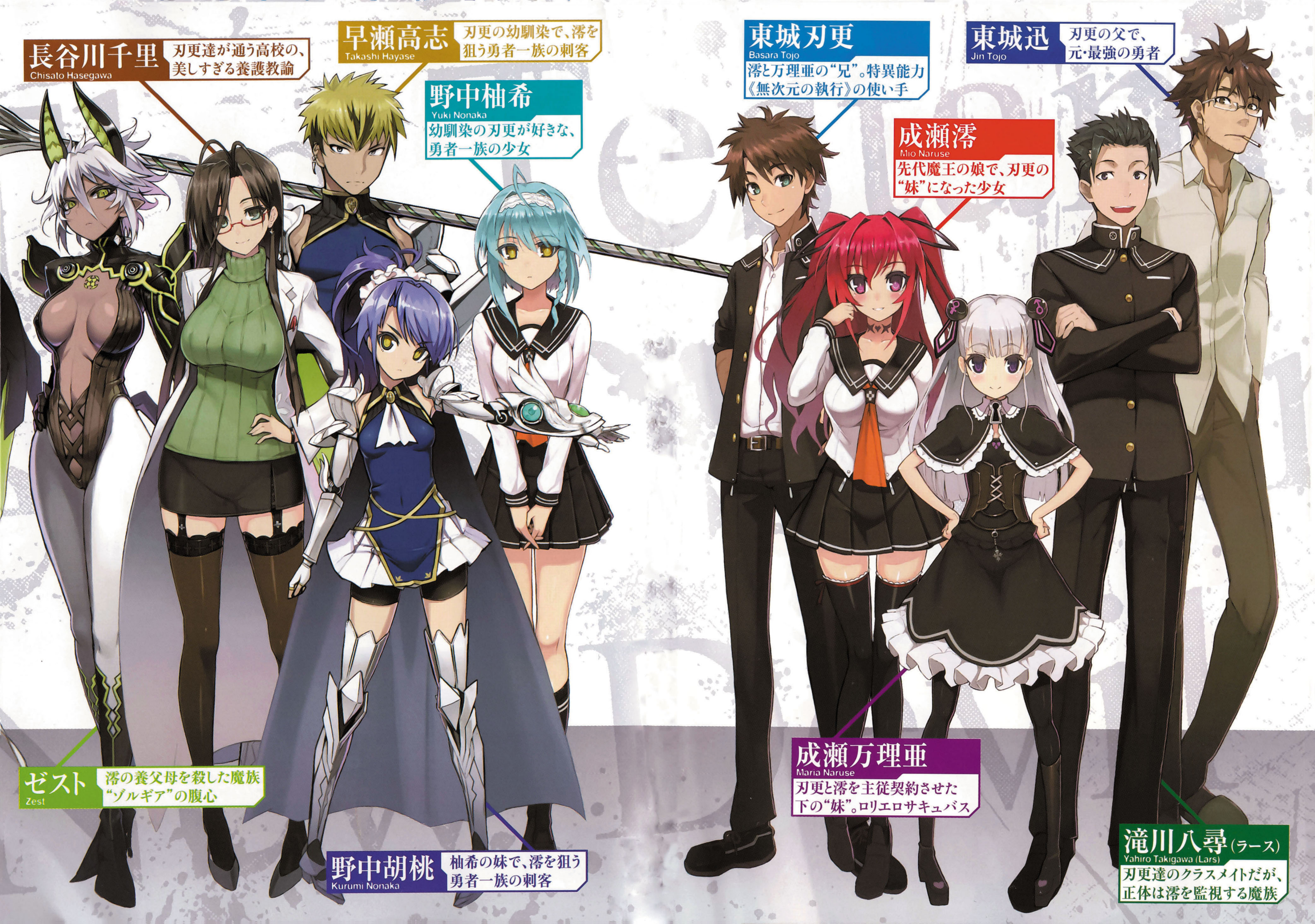
テスタメント

II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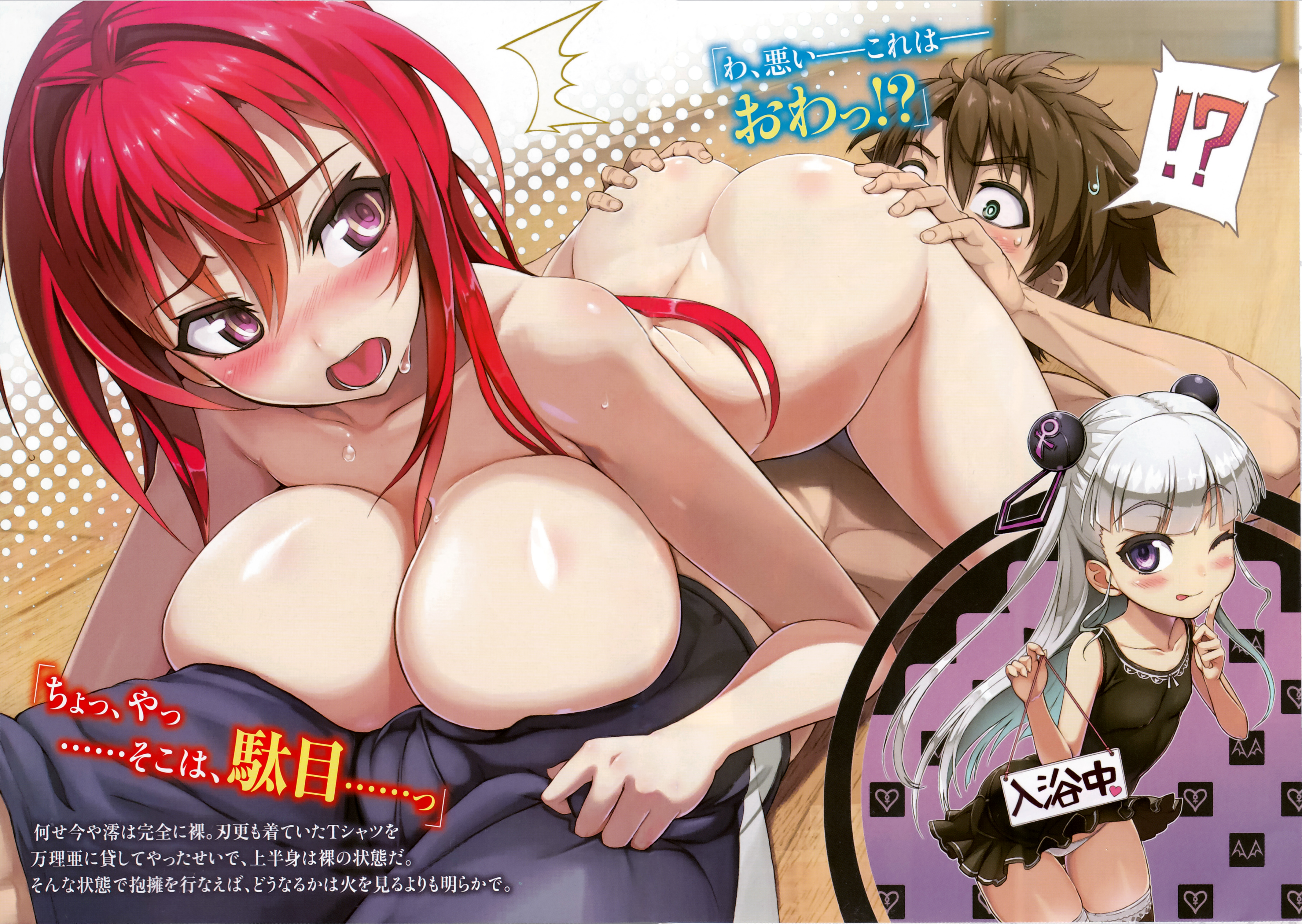
Yahiro Takigawa (Lars)
刃更達のクラスメイトだが、
正体は澪を監視する魔族



「わ、悪い——これは——
おわっ!?」

「ちょっ、やっ
……そこは、駄目……っ」

何せ今や澪は完全に裸。刃更も着ていたTシャツを万理亜に貸してやったせいで、上半身は裸の状態だ。そんな状態で抱擁を行なえば、どうなるかは火を見るよりも明らかで。

「喰い千切れ――『白虎』」
「アンタはボロボロになりながら、最後まで理想だけ叫び続ければ良い」
「たとえ《無次元の執行》でも――俺の過去は消せないから」
「あの元勇者の一族の青年……中々に面白い素材ですね」

新妹魔王の契約者（テスタメント）Ⅱ

上栖綴人

角川スニーカー文庫

17796

The Testament of Sister New Devil II

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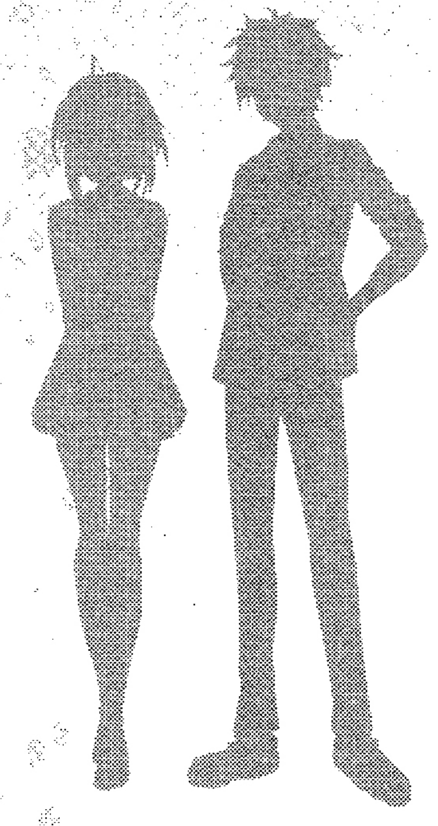


口絵・本文イラスト／大熊猫介（ニトロプラス）
口絵・本文デザイン／濵﨑正隆（NARTI;S）

Peerless Devil Lord Sister in the Morning

Part 1

Every man has imagined it at least once.

About how a cute girl snuck into your bed before you woke up.

A warm and soft sensation. A faint sweet fragrance.

The girl saying a little bit embarrassed, but with a smile--- Morning.

That was a happiness only granted to a limited amount of people.

"…………."

However, on this morning Toujou Basara, suddenly waking up from a feeling of suffocation, was put into a situation close to it. It wasn't like he had a nightmare. The feeling of suffocation originated from something else.

The origin was--- a little girl under the blanket in the bed Basara was laying in. The little girl had crawled up below the blanket, right into the T-shirt Basara was wearing.

Moreover, the little girl's adorable face was right in front of Basara's eyes. In other words, the little girl's head shot out of the collar, where Basara's head was already coming out.

"Good morning, Basara-san."

"Maria…? Eh, wait a sec--- Uwah!?"

Since they were stuck together face-to-face, not even the slightly movement was possible.

---No, physically it wasn't impossible. The wide T-shirt Basara wore instead of a pyjama was made of a good material and flexibility. But--- even though it was made like that, would it endure this excess?

"Oh no~ You cannot do that, silly Basara-san. It is quite dangerous to force yourself to get up."

He got pissed off at that reaction, but couldn't give a retort. In exchange, Basara stiffened up.

Because Basara felt a soft and smooth sensation over the broad area of his chest to his stomach under the T-shirt, under which Maria had slipped into. Without doubt, it was from Maria's bare skin. In other words,

"A- Are you… naked under my T-shirt---"

"Oh please, Basara-san. There is no way I will be so rude as to enter someone else's bed with my clothes still on."

"Screw your unnecessary consideration!"

If so, be considerate about the ultimate rudeness of entering someone else's T-Shirt.

"---Actually, why didn't I wake up before this all happened?"

It was a slight shock for him. Upon that,

"Have you forgotten, Basara-san? I am a succubus. A devil that appears in dreams. Sleeping spells are my specialty." Maria laughed with Fufufu.

"Of course it might not have worked if you were awake, Basara-san. However, it was a sure thing while you were asleep, defenseless. You let your guard down."

"That's a damn premeditated crime!"

So much for the police when he couldn't even sleep calmly in his own room.

"Oh please, Basara-san. Even though you are really happy about it. Come on, be honest."

Showing a roguish smile, Maria entwined her arms around his neck, brought her body even closer and glided her skin by pressing onto him.

…Wait, this is bad…

Even with young features and a small body, Maria was still a proper girl. Her looks were proud of an extraordinary cuteness and honestly, this distance was dangerous. The smooth skin unique to girls, the moderate yet soft swellings of her breasts, all of Maria was only a stimulation to Basara, a boy. Above all, there were two tickling sensations on Basara's body matching with Maria's movements. It most likely were the Maria's nipples, whose sensation became more firm with every rub.

"Mm… Ah… Mm… Fuh…"

Her childish expression turned gradually sexy and the voice she leaked started to fill with passion.

"I, I get it. …I admit defeat. Please, just get out of my T-Shirt."

"I refuse."

"S- Say what?"

On his panic, Maria changed her satisfied smile into a roguish one.

"The inside of your clothes already belongs to me, Basara-san. If you insist that I leave, you need to tell me 'Maria… I want to come inside you'--- Yes, quietly moaning with a sweet voice!"

After responding to the overly cheeky succubus girl with silence for a while,

"Maria…" "Basara-san."

Maria unnecessarily sparkled her eyes, whereas Toujo Basara dropped his right fist onto her head.

A dull 'BAM' sound. Maria leaked an "Ouh" voice of anguish, then turned teary.

"Y- You raised your hand against a girl!"

"Yeah… I'm a horrible guy. But you're even more horrible, so I had no other choice!"

Basara swiftly pulled back both his hand through the sleeves, then pushed away Maria's body inside the T-Shirt to a secure space.

Then he kept his eyes shut as to not see her naked and immediately retreated out of the T-Shirt.

Basara, naked on top, said to Maria, who wore his T-Shirt like a one-piece dress.

"Actually, what's with 'quietly moaning with a sweet voice'? …Well, though I somehow already know."

"The Japanese language is quite difficult. But I believe the important part in communication is to convey your feelings. The MIND."

"No. The important part in communication is etiquette and common sense."

First of all, never enter my T-Shirt without my consent. I'll sue you for illegal trespassing.

Part 2

"Jeez, what a morning…"

Basara left his room wearily. He couldn't let Maria be naked, so he gave up on getting his T-Shirt back for now and went down the stairs dressed in shorts and topless.

The end of summer with no sight of fall coming. The temperature was still high, so he didn't feel cold.

To awaken his half-asleep head, Basara headed to the washroom.

While scratching the back of his head, he opened the wood patterned door and went inside.

"---------"

Inadvertently he stood still. Because there stood the other girl that was living together with Basara--- Naruse Mio.

---Basara came to the washroom to wash his face and brush his teeth, but the place had another function.

It was the changing room for those that entered the bath in the back. Therefore,

"……."

Basara was captivated by Mio and her appearance.

A single bath towel--- That was how Mio right in front of him looked like right now.

She was beautiful. He didn't know if she took a morning bath or shower. Nevertheless, her flushed face of course, but also her body still covered with water drops and her shiny wet hair that reached till her waist, all of it was beautiful.

Moreover, her proportions were already closer to an irregularity than unsurpassable. Her overly tempting big breasts and curves that ran from her slender waist over her bottom down to her thighs, drew a charming body line that wasn't typical for the Japanese. That body was clad in a white bath towel, which boosted her sex-appeal, and perfectly emphasized that Mio was a girl. Basara inadvertently stood stock still from the stimulation that was too strong right after getting up, whereupon

"-----"

He saw Mio's face getting red, taking a breath. She's gonna scream--- The moment he thought so, Basara moved reflexive. He opened the door of the washroom/changing room behind him, rushed out at once and considered how to apologize.

…However.

To avoid such incidents, they supposedly made various arrangements as a countermeasure when they started to live together. Even so, the sign with "Girl's time" hadn't been hang on the door. Did she forget to hang it? No, Mio wouldn't make such a careless mistake. Then,

…Must've been Maria…

Most likely, before Maria came to Basara's room, she passed by the bathroom and removed the sign that Mio had put up. Nothing unusual for the prankster Maria. How troublesome.

That said, he knew what to do. He didn't know if Mio would believe his excuse, but he could only properly explain the circumstances to her and beg for her forgiveness. So Basara nodded with "Okay"--- and suddenly realized. Before he had noticed, Mio stood right before him.

He had thought for sure that she would be filled with rage, but Mio didn't say anything.

"? Huh…?"

There Basara realized another thing. His left hand was around Mio's waist while his right covered her mouth. And--- for some reason, Basara was inside the bathroom instead of outside.

"…Ehm, just what's going on…?"

While saying so, his intonation at the end of his sentence was trembling. He broke out a cold sweat.

Mh, how weird. By chance, could it actually be?

In other words, it was that. His mind, faced with an extreme situation, escaped reality and made him imagine leaving the bathroom. Something like an alternative future kaleidoscope? In reality, he had forcefully pulled Mio, who was going to raise a scream, closer and covered her mouth against her will?

"-------"

Oh my god. He wanted to prevent her from screaming due to a misunderstanding that bad? Apparently his body had outdone his mind. That said, the situation had only taken a turn for the worse, getting to the worst case. As Mio's bath towel had fallen down in the moment he forcefully pulled her closer and shut her up by covering her mouth, their bodies were in direct contact now.

"……."

She must have been perplexed by the all too sudden situation. As she didn't know how to react, Mio dumbfounded stayed in Basara's arm without moving.

Anyhow, right now Mio was completely naked. Since Basara lent Maria the shirt he was wearing, his top half was naked. What happened when they hugged in that state was clearer than crystal clear.

Even while he knew he shouldn't, Basara dropped his gaze, where Mio's overly voluminous breasts stuck to his stomach region and to prove their first-rate softness, they were squeezed into a lewd shape. Different from Maria's, their size and sensation were both visually and sensually destructive to the max.

"S- Sorry, this--- Uwah!?"

Basara tried to hastily jump back and grandly slipped on the water that had dropped from Mio's body and hair. Naturally the embraced Mio was dragged into it too.

"---Kyaa"

Basara instantly reacted to the scream from within his arms. While forcefully twisting his body in mid-air, he pulled Mio closer and somehow managed to bring his body under hers before they hit the ground. Turning himself into a cushion, the impact Mio received from the fall was reduced. Since he was holding Mio, both his hands were occupied, but he barely managed to absorb the fall with his back, arms, and shoulders.

Even so, the impact from the fall gave him a dull pain and he tried to get up while scowling.

Like that, he plunged his head into some soft things.

"---Hyahn!?" "? S- Sorry!"

On her surprised voice, Basara noticed his next mistake. He most likely had buried his face into Mio's breasts. He hastily grabbed Mio's shoulders and tried to get away.

"Hey, Yah… Not, there…"

But Mio raised a sweet voice in bewilderment, leaving Basara surprised about the sudden occurrence.

Because of Mio's voice, but also because the shoulder he supposedly grabbed was surprisingly soft.

---Of course a girl's body was softer than a boy's, with no exception at the shoulders.

However, this sensation was clearly from something different than a shoulder. And then Toujou Basara finally realized the situation he was in.

"Eh…m."

Mio's face, who he had thought was right before him, wasn't there. There was only a crack. Her bottom.

Whensoever it happened, Mio was on top of Basara the other way round than him.

Basara hadn't plunged his head into Mio's breasts, but her groin area. And what he grabbed, believing it to be her shoulders, was her bottom. On top of having ended up tightly holding the curving portion on both sides that lead to her thighs, he ended up spreading that crack by pushing up what he believed to be her shoulders. Basara unexpectedly got a look at Mio's everything.

"---KYAAAAAAAAAA"

This time Mio hastily jumped away from Basara along with a scream. Grabbing the bath towel on the ground with a red face, she pulled it to herself to hide her body.

"Why're you coming in when I'm already inside!? Pervert! I'll kill you a hundred times!"

Even though there was a more important matter, Mio shouted the original problem as she got upset.

"Sorry! The door hadn't the sign, so I thought---"

"Liar! Come up with a better lie for an excuse, Basara!"

"No, it's not a lie! Really, believe me!"

Basara opened the bathroom door by pulling it to himself while shaking his head to the sides.

"See, no sign. Right?"

"No way… I certainly put it on."

Mio, seeing that there was no sign, couldn't believe it.

"Don't tell me, you hid it… Did you want to peek on me bathing and if you were to get caught, you wanted to blame me for forgetting the sign while saying 'It's an accident'?"

"As if! Besides--- if I did a cowardly act like that, everything would be over!"

Living together with Mio and Maria started with the talk about Jin's remarriage. In the end, the remarriage was just made-up, but even so, Basara considered Mio and Maria as his little sisters--- as his new family. That didn't even change after he found out that Mio was actually the daughter of the previous Devil Lord Wilbert and that Maria is her succubus attendant. The reason was that the same applied to Basara and Jin as well. However their relationship was far from normal and to live together under the same roof, trust was needed more than anything.

---Just the other day, Basara drove away the enemy that came after Mio and succeeded in saving Mio from her inherited power that had gone out of control. One way or another he managed to help the girl he wanted and swore to protect. Before, there had been some anxiety in their mutual trust, but Basara believed that thanks to that incident they would be able to get through together now. As proof,

"… I see. Yeah, right…"

Mio, calming down a bit, accepted Basara's words. If he had done any dirty act that betrayed Mio, the finally established trust would be ruined.

Basara wouldn't do something so stupid--- She must have believed so.

"But… then why?"

"I didn't remove the sign you put up. That only leaves one suspect, right?"

To be honest, Basara didn't want to suspect the other person living with him. He didn't want to, but she slipped into his T-Shirt early in the morning after all. He might have taken her side if that hadn't happened, but now he could no longer cover for her.

"Mhm~ I see… That's how it is. Then I'll have looong talk with her later."

Mio said while showing an intense smile, but suddenly,

"But--- You should be able to know my whereabouts with the Master-Servant magic. Why did you come inside?"

"Hey… Have you forgotten about it in your rage?"

Basara sighed on her question. Certainly, Basara and Mio had formed a "certain contract" with magic and if they wanted, they could locate each other. But,

"We agreed to not search for each other with it unless it's an emergency, since it's an invasion of privacy."

At worst, they could find out various things like when one was taking a bath, when one was on the toilet and for how long they did that. Even if they were a family living under the same roof, it honestly wasn't wise to know that much about the other.

Above all, they were teens.

A minimal amount of privacy and consideration called for the appropriate indifference needed for a boy and a girl living together. It was a pact made out of necessity for them and they agreed to not search for each other habitually.

"You're right, sorry… But Basara, why did you suddenly cover my mouth then instead of getting out when you noticed I was inside earlier? And you were quite forcefully at it."

…Right. Of course she would be bothered about that.

"Moreover--- Why aren't you wearing anything on top today of all days?"

Asked further with an upturned gaze, Basara was at a loss for an answer.

Forcefully covering Mio's mouth was a reflexively unconscious action.

To explain the matter about him being topless would also require telling her about the incident with Maria.

But he got the feeling that explaining either of these would only sound like an excuse.

"Ehm…. I'm sorry."

Basara lowered his head. He himself was partly responsible for making Mio feel embarrassed.

"I see--- But it's fine, you don't need to apologize, Basara."

On this calm voice, Basara made a sigh of relief while raising his head--- and then he saw.

Mio, clad in the bath towel again, grinning while emitting a pale glint from her body.

"---I'll forgive you with 50k volt."

The moment she said so, the small lightning she released turned into a high-voltage stream and ran through Basara's whole body.

Part 3

"Aw, damn… What a disaster."

After Mio gave him that lightning attack and left the bathroom, Basara got into the bath and took a shower. He wanted to wash his body that had carelessly dropped on the floor topless and while it was the end of summer, the heat was still enough to make him sweat during sleep. Because of that Mio must have taken a shower like Basara now too.

---There was a reason to why Toujou Basara could accept a situation like that.

It wasn't only because he ran into Mio in the bath numerous times or had bold morning happenings with the other gender due to Maria. Maria was, like she proclaimed herself, a succubus, meaning a devil that appeared in dreams, whereas Mio was raised as a human, but could use powerful magic as she was the child of the late previous Devil Lord. Naturally it would be rather difficult for a normal human to live together with these two.

Even so--- Toujou Basara could stay and live together with Mio and Maria, because he had a tolerance for principles that escaped the common world.

That tolerance was related to Basara's birth and past.

"…………."

Suddenly recalling his past, Basara got a gloomy expression. Even so,

"I have to keep it together…"

Basara's reliable father--- Toujou Jin was currently out of house due to certain reasons.

Put in charge, he had to protect his sisters, Mio and Maria, by himself as the oldest son.

"Fuh…"

While washing away the sweat, the shower gradually warmed up Basara's body. It was a human instinct to wash one's head too when getting it wet.

"Argh…"

His body was still a bit numb from Mio's lightning attack, so he couldn't properly wash his head.

"---Leave it to me."

Along with a calm voice, slender fingers entered Basara's hair and started to gently wash his head and hair.

Just like at a barber, it felt pleasant to have someone else wash your head.

"Oh, thanks. How thoughtful…. Eh?"

Basara noticed the abnormal situation too late since it was conducted all so naturally, and finally turned around. There was a girl clad in a bath towel making a puzzled face.

Finely chiselled features. Looks that could pass her off as a model because of her tall and slender figure.

A clear beautiful girl with a type different from Mio and Maria.

"Y- Yuki… wh- why are you here…?"

Basara was inadvertently surprised and confused. Right in front of his eyes was his childhood friend Nonaka Yuki.

---A few days ago, Basara had reunited with Yuki after five years. Yuki had become so beautiful that she appeared to be a different person. Basara had only known her young appearance, so he was honestly surprised at her change and growth.

That said, they only met each other again and certainly didn't live together. In fact Yuki shouldn't be in the Toujou House--- let alone the bath in the morning. She made her usual expressionless face.

"I came to pick you up. I wanted to go to school together with you."

"I- Is that so… No wait, how did you get into the house?"

Regrettably, there was quite some bad blood between Yuki and Mio/Maria.

It resulted from their standpoints and partly due to their emotions.

"Through the door. The succubus let me in."

That damn loli succubus. She wasn't satisfied by just slipping into my t-shirt, she also had to play yet another ridiculous prank!

"Well, but when did you get into the bath…?"

"I didn't want to disturb you so early in the morning. ---So I completely erased my presence."

"Your modesty is getting out of hand!"

A guy with a weak heart would die, when someone suddenly washed his head from behind!

Yuki uncaringly brought her body closer.

"Basara… can I wash you?"

"N- No, it's not good to be in here together, Yuki… You know that, right?"

"…Why? We often did so in the past."

"No, that was five years ago--- when we were kids!"

They both were no longer innocent kids. Even through the bath towel, he could tell. Yuki's body strongly emphasized that she was already a fine woman.

Basara hastily wrapped a towel around his waist.

"Besides, you can try to play calm, but your face is red, Yuki… You're embarrassed, right?"

"……..Yeah. A bit. But I wanted to take a bath with you."

One breath.

"Do you… hate taking one with me, Basara?"

"No, I wouldn't say that I hate it…"

Being looked at from below at a very close distance, Basara inadvertently averted his eyes out of shame. He was hesitant to say "I would love to", so he equivocated, but she seemed to understand that as a refusal.

"Huh… Ehm, Yuki-san?" "………"

Yuki had gotten a somewhat displeased expression. And,

"…You took one with Naruse Mio and that succubus, yet you ain't takin' one with me?"

Her speech showed a bit of her dialect. It was a habit that occurred when she couldn't suppress her emotions.

The stuff Maria revealed the other day on the rooftop must still affect her--- But, it was already too late by the time he analyzed that.

"H- Hey…!?"

Not listening to Basara's attempt to stop her, Yuki undid the knot of her own bath towel.

The white cloth fell onto the ground and Yuki's smooth and beautiful skin was exposed.

He hastily turned around, but even so he had gotten a good look.

On how much it grown and how beautiful Nonaka Yuki's body had gotten. Moreover,

"---Basara, let me wash you."

Saying so in a more demanding tone than before, Yuki pressed her body firmly onto Basara's back by hugging onto him. Yuki put her cheek against Basara's back, who had gotten all stiff from the earlier destructive sensation.

"If you don't let me wash you--- I'll do something even bolder."

Her calm voice was filled with seriousness, so Basara resigned right away.

"F- Fine… Wash me. So spare me of anything more…!"

He was neither a hermit or a saint. He was a healthy young boy. It was bad enough already, so if she were to do anything more, his reasoning would completely break.

As she regained a bit of her spirits by getting his approval, Yuki changed her tone back into a calm one with "Then don't move" and started to wash Basara's head. Her gentle and careful handiwork made him feel Yuki's serious personality and above all, her precious feelings towards him.

…Five years, huh.

Compared to the time when they were young and innocently washed each other's body, both Basara and Yuki had changed in various ways now. Not just their age, but also their standpoints and relationships.

---However, there was still something that hadn't changed.

How Yuki preciously felt about Basara.

Likewise, Toujou Basara kept thinking unaltered about Yuki as someone important.

"….." "….."

At some point both of them had fallen silent and a silence had come over the bath.

But it wasn't awkward. It was just a silence brought about from their feelings.

Before long, the water from the shower washed Basara's head clean. Then,

"….Basara."

Suddenly. Yuki called out to him from behind. In a really quiet voice.

"You and Jin-san won't ever come back to the <village>…?"

Basara replied with silence to the asked question. That was the very reason why Basara could accept Mio, a descendant from the Devil Lord, and Maria, a succubus.

---The <village> Yuki mentioned wasn't referring to a simple village in the countryside.

Earlier Yuki had said that the succubus had let her into the house.

That was a statement from someone that admitted the existence of devils like Maria. To protect this worlds from devils, the <Hero Tribe> kept fighting since ancient times--- That was Nonaka Yuki's true identity.

And Toujo Basara as well had once fought for the same mission.

Yes--- Until five years ago, when the cruel tragedy befell the <village>.

A lot of villagers were massacred by a young man that was possessed by a sealed S rank evil spirit.

At that time, Basara saw a lot of comrades getting killed before his eyes and even his friends were in danger, so his own power went out of control. His skill <Banishing Shift> that actually was supposed to erase only an enemy's attack, banished everything, like the possessed young man and the limbs of his killed comrades, into the zero-dimensional space. Afterwards the <village> decided to confine Basara to a prison, but Jin, Basara's father, objected. As a result, Basara and Jin were stripped of their Hero title and had to leave the village. In other words, they were chased out. Therefore,

"…I think that'll prove to be difficult."

Of course he had a nostalgia towards the <village>. But the scars the tragedy caused five years ago still remained unchanged. In the village, in the villagers and--- even in Basara himself.

Even now, five years later, Basara kept having nightmares of that day.

---Besides. Toujou Basara had already set out on a new path.

To protect the girl, who unwillingly inherited the power of the previous Devil Lord and was chased for it by the current Devil Lord and his subordinates,--- Naruse Mio. Neither the Devil Lord, Mio's standpoint as a devil or his past as a Hero matter for what. He swore to protect the two as a family, as their brother.

But that was something adverse to the Hero Tribe's doctrine. That Yuki helped out in the battle the other day was an exception of exceptions. They both understood that.

"But Basara---"

It was in the moment when Yuki tried to say something with a somewhat pleading tone.

Outside the bath--- The door that separated the anteroom of the bath from the hallway, opened after a knock.

"Could it be… you're still inside, Basara? Breakfast's been done for a while now, you know."

Basara froze up on Mio's voice from the anteroom.

She must have come to get Basara, since he just wouldn't finish his shower. Even though that incident happened just a few minutes ago--- Mio was basically very caring. When they moved into this new house to live together, she also tagged along with him when he asked her to show him around, albeit stating her complaints. The education of her late foster parents that raised her in the human world must have been good. They seemingly were subordinates of Mio's real father, the previous Devil Lord, but they must have been good people without doubt.

---However, now wasn't the time to reminisce about Mio's past.

After all Basara was currently together with the naked Yuki in the bath.

"S- Sorry… I'm coming now. Yeah, I'll be able to get out in a bit…"

While replying hastily, Basara handed Yuki the bath towel that was laying on the floor. When he urged her "Please wear it!" with his eyes, Yuki started to wrap up herself with the bath towel while showing an annoyed face.

"…Hey Basara, are you angry about earlier?"

There came a question from Mio with a little worried tone. She must have thought that the lightning attack was overdoing it.

"B- But you were at fault, you hear… I mean, I just got out of the bath, but you suddenly come in and hug me. You were so rough, so the bath towel became undone and did even that during the commotion… I was really embarrassed."

"S- Sorry… But that was…!"

Basara raised a scream in his heart. What Mio mentioned was certainly the truth. It was the truth, but from that selective utterance, one who didn't know the circumstances would probably misunderstand. And as expected,

"--------"

Yuki narrowed her eyes and opened the fogged window of the bath for some reason. And then,

"(H- Hey, what're you doing…Yuki?)"

In front of Basara, who asked with a small voice, Yuki unwrapped her own bath towel of all things and threw it out of the window. GYAA, from the shock, Basara became like the painting The Scream from Munch.

"? What's up, Basara?" "N- Nothing. It's nothing."

He desperately tried to smooth it over, but Yuki closed the window and approached Basara.

As he couldn't escape because of Mio, she clung to him from the front.

"Basara… what did you do in the commotion?"

"(W- Well, just a little accident… Really!)"

Basara declared pacifying to Yuki, who asked him by looking up to him, whereupon outside the bath, "Well… if you say so."

Mio said.

"But Basara--- Why is there a female school uniform and underwear, which don't belong to me here? And they're folded so neatly."

Sorry, these are mine. I'm actually a cross-dresser, ahahaha--- That's not gonna work, damnit!

Excuses were impossible. Basara resigned and at the same time, the door of the bath opened merciless.

"…………."

Awkward to the max. After a silence from all three, Mio opened her mouth first.

"…What has water on top and a big fire below?"

"A, A bath, right…?"

While being clung on by the naked Yuki at the same place like the answer, Basara answered with "Haha".

"---Certainly. Well then, what has fire everywhere, top and below?"

Mio's dangerous eyes were saying: Trick question, go.

"W- Well~ I wonder what. Maybe a burnt out SNS?"

"No, wrong--- You see, it's you, who'll be covered in flames now!"

The emotion she held back exploded. She was about to release her magic like her arising anger--- In that moment, Mio suddenly shivered her body with "Ah". And then,

"Yah… No way, now…? ---Ahhn."

While suddenly letting out a sweet voice, Mio slumped and sunk down on the floor.

"H- Hey--- Are you okay?"

When he hastily rushed over, there was a collar-like mark around Mio's neck.

"Uwah… The curse of the Master and Servant contract." "…What's the matter?"

Yuki was puzzled by Mio's strange behaviour, whereas Basara looked at Mio, who emitted a sweet allure, while giving her the bath towel that he had prepared for himself.

…It hadn't activated for a while now.

Actually--- Basara and Mio were currently bound by a magic "Master and Servant Contract".

Maria suggested it, since the contracting parties could locate each other, so when Mio was in danger, Basara could find her.

Originally Mio was supposed to be the Master, but for some reason the contract was formed reversed. Basara had become Mio's Master.

Moreover, this contract aimed at solidifying the relationship between Master and Servant, so when the servant betrayed or had a guilty consciousness towards the master, a curse immediately activated.

Their contract was chanted with the help of Maria's power, so the activating curse got the special characteristic of Maria the succubus.

---Dream Devil, Incubus, Succubus. Its special characteristic was "aphrodisiac".

During the incident where Basara had entered the anteroom with Mio in it, she chanted the lighting attack after Basara's apology, so there was no problem. But this time Mio was worried if she maybe overdid it earlier. So when she tried to attack Basara now, she must have felt guilty somewhere in the back of her heart. That might have switched on the curse.

"Yah, Ah… Hahn, Fuh… Mm…"

She desperately bit down on her lips to stifle her voice, but she couldn't suppress the stream of pleasure that beset her whole body.

Mio twisted her body on the floor unbearable, whereupon the door of the anteroom was opened with attitude.

"Excuse me! Am I right here for Mio-sama getting all yielding from pleasure!?"

Howsoever she noticed, Maria came in quickly.

And when she saw Mio on the floor and the naked Basara and Yuki, she sparkled her eyes with "Ohh".

"I thought this would happen, so I bought this in advance. The world's smallest and lightest! The never fading memories, the memorials of youth will be with you!"

Swiftly setting up a small video camera that she pulled out from wherever, Maria started to film Mio.

"…………"

Basara wordlessly grabbed her at the nape of her neck, threw her into the bath, shut the door and merciless blocked it from his side with a mop and the washing machine. Right away the door was beat with BAM BAM from the other side.

"What are you doing, Basara-san! Are you still angry about the t-shirt? I apologize for hiding Mio-sama's bathing sign! I can stay here, but at least the camera… Please use at least the camera! For my pride and soul as a succubus, I have to film the current Mio-sama!"

"Shut up! Restrain yourself, damn loli succubus!"

Basara succeeded in isolating the root of all this, squatted down besides Mio and softly lifted her up.

"---Are you okay, Mio?"

"It's your fault… Mm, St- Stupid Brother… I'll kill you a hundred times."

Mio, full of pleasure, entwined her arms around Basara's neck and tightly clung to him, albeit vexing. Calling Basara "Brother" was Mio's unconscious habit that appeared when the curse of the Master and Servant Contract activated.

But most likely the activated curse wasn't that strong. If she were to lay down and rest, the curse should ease up soon. Nevertheless Mio had an unyielding spirit. She surely didn't want Yuki to see her like this. The only way to cancel the curse in no time was for Basara to subjugate the servant--- Mio as her master and confirm her loyalty.

The things he could do were inevitably limited in this state, where she drowned in pleasure. Therefore, "Okay… Let's go to your room."

It certainly would be embarrassing to do on the sofa in the living room so early in the morning.

"Sorry, Yuki… She's feeling a bit bad, so I have to tend to her. I'll be right back, so wait in the living room after you put on your clothes."

"…………Okay."

As she understood that Mio's state was strange, Yuki nodded, albeit a bit displeased. So Basara left the anteroom while carrying Mio.

Walking down the hallway, he thought while going up the stairs to the second floor.

He wanted to protect Mio's everyday life, but he got the feeling that it didn't include this situation.

At this rate Basara's reasoning, endurance, soul and body definitely wouldn't last.

At some point he would certainly commit a mistake. He couldn't afford to hurt Mio--- his little sister in that horrible way.

Therefore Toujou Basara mumbled quietly. It was a shame to abandon the merit of being able to locate each other, but

"On the next full moon, where we can annul the contract, I'll break this Master and Servant Contract--- My body can't take it."

Yakiniku and Youth Special Edition

Part 1

A sight that was worth being called a masterpiece.

A contrast of white and red, stimulating the appetite of the watcher. A brilliant colourfulness that covered the whole of the big table. It was beef that was cut so that it looked extremely delicious from any angle. Yakiniku. In the restaurant, which was like an everlasting absolute justice for him, Toujou Basara sat at the table across his classmate Takigawa Yahiro.

"Wh- What's with these beef tongues? They look like they're laying sideways… They're at least 1cm thick, Basacchi."

"Yeah, let's grill them quickly and eat… There's still a lot of other meat too."

"O- Okay… Then here I go."

Summoning his resolve, Takigawa threw the beef tongues on the field called charcoal grill.

Along with a sizzling sound, the delicious smell of grilling meat instantly hung in the air.

"Th- Then I'll help myself first."

With a gulp, Takigawa nervously carried the beef tongue towards his mouth--- In the next moment,

"S- So, gooood. What's this!? This is no longer just beef!"

He widened his eyes and shouted. Basara inadvertently made a wry smile.

"No, it's beef alright."

"Watcha doing, Basacchi, eat up! Sweet… This meat is so damn good."

"Yeah, I will. But don't hold yourself back, Takigawa. The fine meat will burn if it grills too much."

Basara said so to Takigawa, who started to put the beef one piece after another on the grill.

"Pfft, like I would let them get burned. I'll nicely eat them all!"

Welcoming the peek of joy and excitement, the hands controlling the chopsticks and the mouths eating the meat didn't stand still.

Basara and Takigawa's meal started for real.

"---But is it okay, Basacchi? Treating me at such an expensive restaurant."

Takigawa asked without stopping his eating hand, whereas Basara nodded with "Yeah".

Basara had taken Takigawa to a Yakiniku restaurant called "Akagi".

"I told you, this restaurant has an all-you-can-eat only for students… and even at a student charge."

"But together with my share, it's 5000 yen. That's quite the sum."

Considering it was a high schooler repaying a small favour, 2500 yen per person was certainly expensive. However Basara had a different reason for bringing Takigawa here.

---The devils were currently divided into two big forces. Into the "Current Devil Lord Faction" which was a hardliner faction that wanted to resume the invasion of the human world, and the "Moderate Faction" which followed the will of the previous Devil Lord Wilbert, who wanted to avoid conflicts with humans as much as possible. Nonetheless, after Wilbert's death, the once powerful moderate faction quickly lost their influence. Leading to Mio being chased by the current Devil Lord faction, since she unwittingly inherited the Devil Lord's power from her father.

Furthermore--- Takigawa Yahiro's real identity was an observer for Mio, sent by the current Devil Lord faction.

Basara had fought with him due to some development. In fact, that was just the other day.

And now, Basara had formed a secret alliance with him under the mutual conditions that Basara wouldn't spread the news about Takigawa's failure to the current Devil Lord faction. Takigawa then implicitly admitted to be a secret spy from the moderate faction, which worked on protecting Mio like Maria does, against the current Devil Lord Faction who are after Mio.

It was an alliance on equal grounds. Even so, Takigawa gave Basara an important piece of information.

The true identity of the culprit who killed Mio's foster parents and drove her to fight the Devils that came after her.

But Basara hadn't told Mio about that yet. Mio's reason to fight stemmed from taking revenge for her killed foster parents. It would be bad if she were to emotionally go out of control when he carelessly told her, and the situation wasn't all too clear anyway. Thus it was better for only Basara to know about it for now.

Because of that, he owed Takigawa big time. Of course he didn't think that treating him to Yakiniku would make them even, but

"Don't worry about that. I still have my savings from each month."

"Okay then. But your dad is away these days, right? Didn't you get some money for living expenses? And this here practically falls under necessary expenses."

"You sure know your stuff… But I can't use my dad's money to treat you."

Currently he had gotten Jin's credit card. But Basara formed the alliance with Takigawa on his own judgement. So he couldn't use the card for it.

"Mhm, I see…"

Takigawa had finished eating all the meat on the grill and said so like he was seeing through Basara's intention.

"I thought for sure you were going to ask something of me again in exchange for the Yakiniku."

"I'm not so dauntless that I could demand valuable information or assistance just because I treated you once. Today's under the motto 'Let's get along from now on', that's all."

Therefore,

"I'll repay you for taking over my task from Sakasaki-sensei another time and the debt for telling me about Zolgear--- the murder of Mio's foster parents, I'll pay that back from now on as best I can."

"Jeez, why so serious, Basacchi~ All the stories I heard about Toujou Jin were epochal--- Are you really his son?"

Jin once was a Hero that hogged the title of the strongest Hero in the <village> all to himself. The stories Basara had heard were all unbelievable battle legends of Jin during the great war. According to the stories he had heard in the <village> from all those that knew the past Jin, Jin had apparently become quite pacifistic now, but

"…Guess he's famous in the demon realm too?"

"Well, duh. He killed quite a number of our high class devils in the great war. Amongst us devils, Toujou Jin is feared as our strongest enemy--- like a war god. When the previous Devil Lord Wilbert ordered the retreat, there were two reasons why the guys, who wanted to keep fighting, reluctantly obeyed. One was Wilbert's clout, who was the strongest devil back then even as a centrist, the other was the fear of Toujou Jin's monstrous fighting strength."

As expected, Jin was such an outstanding man that even Tokigawa, a devil, told him the same again. As his son, it didn't feel bad to have his father praised. In fact, Basara is actually proud of him.

And then--- their conversation temporarily came to a halt. In this silence, they nicely ate the Yakiniku with relish for a while.

Continuing to eat even more silent than at a crab meal, they were about to get to the last plate of their first order when---

"Oh, right, that reminds me, I have some information I better tell you, Basacchi."

"Information? …You sure?"

"Well, it seems like I can trust you. Besides, now that we have teamed up it would be bad for me too, in various ways, if you were to get into a disadvantageous situation."

With that, Takigawa wearily made a wry smile and suddenly, his eyes turned serious.

"---During the incident at the park before, Naruse Mio let her power go out of control, right? It was quite devastating. I had to secretly patch it up with magic. The news of it still reached the current Devil Lord faction, but also the moderate faction. I don't know yet how the moderate faction will make their move, but--- the current Devil Faction has decided to appoint a new observer, since they have judged that Naruse Mio has awakened the inherited power from Wilbert."

Basara froze up on these words.

"A new observer… Don't tell me, you're being replaced and returning to the demon realm?" He had no plans to fully rely on Takigawa, but right now Basara and the girls overwhelmingly lacked battle strength compared to the current Devil Lord faction. Thus he wanted to borrow Takigawa's strength until he could read the situation a bit better. If Takigawa goes back to the demon realm now---

"---No. My surveillance mission continues. The point is, it feels like they're sending in reinforcement just in case, since there's been development. I mean, the top brass has always been after the power Naruse Mio inherited."

"I see… I got cold feet, thinking you would leave."

"Still, don't let your guard down. With another observer, it surely will be harder for me to cooperate. And while I said reinforcement, it isn't necessarily someone weaker than me. Besides, the Master and Servant Contract between Naruse Mio and you is still new, right?"

"? What do you mean?"

Was there something with the Master and Servant Contract that he had to be careful about?

"That magic has a long history… Since long ago, it has been used quite often and was improved on various occasions. At first it only made you able to locate each other and activated the curse on betrayal, but now it can even amplify the power of the Master and Servant, when they share a strong loyalty and trust. The master can power up his servant and the servant for his master. That's why high-class Devils have a lot of servants with the Master and Servant Contract to increase their own strength."

"Is that so…?"

Maria didn't explain it to him to that extent. Most likely the important part for Maria was that it was a countermeasure that allowed them to locate Mio when she was in danger.

"---And on the other hand, it also serves the purpose of preventing information leaks, should the servant be caught by the enemy. Since being caught by the enemy and becoming a burden to the master is the biggest betrayal." said Takigawa.

"Regardless of the characteristic, the servant won't be able to survive when the curse activates at maximum."

"…Seems so."

The characteristic of the curse from the contract between Basara and Mio came from Maria. Since she lent her power for the chanting of the contract spell, she gave it the characteristic of a succubus' "aphrodisiac". From what Maria had said, if the curse is activated at maximum, the brain nerves would fry from intense pleasure. She was being half-serious, but it surely was the truth. It was quite a well-made contract magic, considering it even prevented information leaks from prisoners.

"So you better be careful. You guys made the contract spell from the succubus, since the one from Mio's inherited power would be dangerous, right?"

"Yeah… Guess so."

"This isn't an all too pleasant story--- High-class Devils live a long time and some of them purposefully make a Master and Servant Contract with the succubus' characteristic instead of their own. Living a long life makes them crave for some amusement."

"Amusement…?"

"For sex plays. Just like drugging a woman, the 'aphrodisiac' chains her with pleasure."

"…I see. Really not pleasant."

"Nah, that's still innocent. The real assholes switch servants amongst themselves and play around by purposefully letting the curse activate."

"Play around… wait, don't tell me they're meaninglessly killing their own servants?"

"Nah, not like that… Well, since you're so sincere, it's an unknown world to you." said Takigawa with a wry smile.

"The servant devotes his soul and body to his master and when someone else does something to the servant, it will be a perfect betrayal against the master. Because the servant couldn't protect his chastity--- What do you think will happen then?" Ah, Basara changed his expression on finally realizing it, whereas Takigawa nodded.

"Yeah. Being done by someone else than the master--- That immoral feeling activates the curse. If you're lucky, the curse is too strong and you can die, but at worst you lose your sanity and can't even feel the immorality anymore. But they have no use for a broken toy. They dispose of them, get a new toy--- and repeat everything."

And,

"Incidentally, the deviser of this sick play was--- the murderer of Naruse Mio's foster parents, Zolgear." Basara swallowed down his breath with a gulp.

"Th- Then… the reason you relieved him of his observation."

"Exactly. There's a possibility that Naruse's inherited power will disappear should she die from a weird stunt from Zolgear. The top brass judged that there was a risk that Zolgear, after killing her foster parents who belonged to the moderate faction, would lay his hands on Naruse as well."

Basara was at a loss for words from the shocking story.

"So be careful. Zolgear can easily tell that Naruse's under the Master and Servant contract. Should she ever fall into his hands, she would never be sane again when he does something to her, since he's the all so hateful enemy that killed her foster parents. Well considering her personality, she would bite off her own tongue before someone does anything to her--- But you would like to avoid that, wouldn't you, Basacchi?"

"Obviously…!"

That alone he would never let happen. Looking down, Basara tightly clenched his teeth.

"Well, the top brass won't let Zolgear near Naruse anymore and I don't believe they would do anything strange, since they don't want Wilbert's power to disappear when Naruse dies from the curse after it's known that she's under the Master and Servant contract."

That certainly was a big advantage. Quite big, but

"…But, they aren't the only enemies going after Wilbert's power."

Besides the moderate faction that tried to protect Mio, there were other forces that opposed the current Devil Lord faction. From their point of view, they could deal damage to the current Devil Lord faction by killing Mio.

The enemy of their enemy wasn't necessarily their ally. Once again noticing how difficult it was to protect Mio, Basara made a serious expression, whereupon Takigawa suddenly said quietly.

"---Well, it's not like I'm out of ideas." "Really?"

Basara raised his head in a flash.

"There are two ways to cancel the contract. The first is to annul it with the same spell in agreement with both parties. The other way is to 'change it into a vow'." said Takigawa.

"As a symbol for the contract, a mark like a collar appears around the neck. It's colour changes depending on the level of loyalty. With a low loyalty level the mark is blue, but with rising levels it gets violet-blue, then violet-red and lastly crimson red."

And,

"When it then raises to the highest level --- maximum loyalty, the mark disappears and the curse won't activate anymore. After all, the servant won't ever betray the master at this point. That's the phenomena where the 'contract' sublimates into a 'vow'. Though there are not many cases of reaching that state, even from the past. But it's said that no one was able to win against a master and his servant in that state."

"In other words, if Mio and I reach loyalty on the level of a vow, we'll become as strong as the former examples?… But Mio and I have only known each other for a little while, you know." It surely was possible, precisely because Devils had a long lifespan.

"Guess so. But even if reaching the vow level is impossible, it's worth to deepen the trust and loyalty between you two. I mean, the contract magic changes your feelings for each other into strength… That said, if you give up before even trying, it certainly will be impossible for you."

Being told with a sharp cynicism, Basara inadvertently fell silent, whereas Takigawa said "Well,".

"You can't decide it by yourself. Discuss what to do with Naruse."

"…Yeah, I will."

In regards, Basara said just that with a low voice.

---It wasn't like he couldn't trust Mio. Basara had no confidence in himself.

He was not a person that could ever get Mio to trust him.

Toujou Basara could not believe in Toujou Basara.

In himself, who once committed a sin and banished a lot of comrades.

He couldn't tell her to trust him as he was, even if it ripped his mouth.

Basara once again recognized the grave situation they were in and fell silent, whereupon

"We have fine meat here, so let's stop the gloomy talk now… To begin with, you can't do anything about worst case scenarios, no matter how hard you think."

"……Yeah."

"I mean, this is an all-you-can-eat, right? Then we gotta order more for to make the most of our money."

He felt Takigawa's kindness from the topic change.

"You're right… Okay, let's stuff ourselves!"

Basara temporarily got his spirit back and called the waiter with an "Excuse me~". While looking at the menu with Takigawa, they discussed if they should either get beef ribs, pork loins or guts. After deciding, they ordered.

As they watched the waiter leaving, they moistened their throats with cola. At that time.

"---Oh. I was guessing those voices were familiar for a while now."

The boys looked up to the sexy female voice coming from the side.

"Hasegawa-sensei…"

There stood the school nurse of Hijirigasaka Academy, that Basara and Takigawa attended, Hasegawa Chisato.

Hasegawa spoke like a man, but with her pretty features and overly glamorous breasts--- she had a sex-appeal and beauty that were not appropriate for pubertal high school boys.

"Toujou and Takigawa… It's just the two of you?"

"Eh? Yes, that's right."

"Great. Sorry, but could you let me sit at your table? Actually I was supposed to meet a friend, but I just got a call that some urgent business came up." said Hasegawa.

"Since I'm here anyway, I wanted to eat alone, but guys from other tables keep calling out to me with 'Wanna eat with us?' Is it such a lonely thing for a woman to eat Yakiniku alone?"

"Well, probably…"

"Ahh, not at all, Sensei."

Basara and Takigawa looked at each other and told her.

"Anyways, they were just so persistent that I considered giving up on my meal and going home, but I've always wanted to try the food here. As students you might be opposed to eating together with a teacher, but I would be grateful if you would let me join you."

"Hah… If it's like that, I don't mind."

That said, if Takigawa was against it, he could only apologetically turn her down. Today they were here for their formed alliance. Basara asked Takigawa with a look that said "What about you?"

"Nah, I'm okay with it too, of course. There are a lot of people, students and teachers alike, who want to eat together with you, Hasegawa-sensei."

"…So he says."

"I see. Then allow me to take a seat."

"Okay Sensei, since it's decided, next to me is free."

Takigawa grinned and offered Hasegawa the seat next him, but the Hasegawa in question readily sat down next to Basara with an "Excuse me".

"Ah, but we're having the student all-you-can-eat, so sharing a table would be---"

"Don't worry about that. The shop isn't at fault, but they don't want to have me troubled. I'm sure they'll comply with it."

Just like she had said, the waiter came with a cold and wet towel and bowed with a "We're sorry" right after Hasegawa sat down at the table. Apparently the staff felt sorry for not being able to keep the other customers in check. Hasegawa ordered a drink and a few kinds of meat from the waiter.

"But I must say, I didn't know this restaurant had an all-you-can-eat for students. Could it be our students often come here?"

"I doubt it. Because it's quite a distance from school, with the station in-between. And while it's cheap considering the taste, it's still a bit expensive for a student to casually come here."

"Right. I didn't know of it either until Basacchi took me here today."

"So you knew about this restaurant beforehand, Toujou. Do you come here often?"

"No, it's my second time today. I only moved here during summer vacation… But I came here once with my father." said Basara.

"My father is a professional photographer and the owner here is apparently a fan of my father. He once requested a photo and the landscape photo at the entrance--- That was taken by my father."

And additionally to the fee of the photo, we were invited here and treated to a meal.

"Hoo… To think this restaurant had a fan of 'JIN' too."

"You know my father?"

"Surprised? I'm not a passionate fan, but I like his photos. A critic said in a magazine or so that his photos capture the original charm of the subject--- a moment that no one else can capture. It can be called an art. Even an amateur like me gets fascinated by it."

"Thanks… I'll tell my father that you said that next time."

With that, Basara lowered his head embarrassed, whereupon the ordered meat and drinks arrived.

Since Basara and Takigawa's additional order and Hasegawa's order arrived together, the table was filled with plates at once.

"Well then, time to eat."

"Okay, we better get serious too."

Along with their words, the various meats started to dance on the grill, giving off a delicious smell.

---Amidst that, Basara remembered Hasegawa's earlier words.

Jin had left the village along with Basara to protect him. The new path that Jin had chose to make a new living from was the camera. Basara had suffered a deep mental wound from the tragedy five years ago, and seeing Jin's photo that stirred up one's emotions from the bottom of the heart, saved him numerous times.

At that time, Jin had no longer been the Hero that saved the world, but even so, for Basara he was the Hero that saved him.

Precisely because he saw Jin like that, Basara could honestly think now that he wanted to protect Mio and Maria.

Part 2

Basara and Takigawa kept eating until the time limit and this Yakiniku day ended with full satisfaction.

Since their houses were in opposite directions, he split up with Takigawa right after leaving the restaurant.

And currently--- Basara walked home together with Hasegawa.

"But you really don't mind, Toujou?"

Hasegawa next to him asked.

"I asked you to let me sit with you, so I could have paid your bill."

"No, it's alright, really. I had to pay for it today."

It would've been meaningless if Basara hadn't paid for Takigawa's share. However,

"Still…"

As Hasegawa still couldn't agree, Basara made a wry smile, thinking what a duteous person she was.

"Then please treat me on the next occasion, at the restaurant of your choice."

"Mhm… Okay. If you're fine with that, I'll invite you another time."

Huh, she won't invite Takigawa. Well, I did pay for his share.

"But I must say… All this about 'Devils' and 'Loyalty', you two sure talk about strange things. I don't know if it's a game or manga, but is it popular these days?"

Apparently she had heard their conversation. Even so, Basara did not panic. Even if they were overheard, most people would mistake it for a game or something on their own, like Hasegawa did. In fact, if you openly responded, it would be no problem.

Thus,

"Well, yeah… It's a game."

"I see. I have no clues about this, so I don't understand, but youngsters sure get hyped up on it. Is it that fun?"

"Well, depends on the person. Everyone has his own enjoyment."

"I guess so. But at least it seems like you're quite hooked on it, Toujou."

"What makes you say that…?"

"Because you sounded so serious when you talked about it with Takigawa."

Hasegawa pointed out with a teasing tone.

"…Yeah, you might be right."

While dropping his gaze a little bit, Basara declared.

"Even if it's a game--- I definitely can't afford to lose."

It wasn't like he was optimistic. The situation they were in was indeed severe. The new dispatched observer. The existence of Zolgear, who killed Mio's foster parents. The advantages and problems of the Master and Servant Contract. There were a lot of things he had to consider dealing with. Then,

"---Eh?"

Suddenly Basara was enveloped by a soft warmth. Then he noticed in what kind of situation he was.

Hasegawa, who had walked next to him, had entwined her arms around his neck and embraced him.

Her big breasts enveloped his face like they were burying it.

"S- Sensei…!?"

Not knowing how to respond to the sudden event, Basara was in a flutter.

"Don't move. It's okay, so stay still."

Hasegawa said with a rebuking tone.

"Geez… Out of the blue you fall silent, only to make such a worried face then. Think about how a teacher feels when her student makes such a face in front of her."

He thought he had suppressed it, but his irritation and impatience must've shown on his face.

"…Sorry."

"There's no need to apologize. Worries are a part of life. Specially for a boy your age. But remember that there are people, who can't leave you alone when you're like that."

Basara nodded lightly, then allowed himself to rely on Hasegawa's attention a little bit.

When he closed his eyes, he could feel her kindness and softness much better.

"……Thank you. I'm fine now."

Before long, he declared his gratitude, whereupon Hasegawa released Basara's head. But even though Hasegawa pulled away both her hands from around his neck, she now entwined them around his waist.

"Ehm, what… Sensei?"

"I told you that I can't leave you alone. You can consult with me now for as much as you can tell me."

"Well, but…"

Basara inadvertently uttered hesitation, whereas Hasegawa slowly brought her face closer.

"Or--- are you against talking with me, Toujou?"

He couldn't say no. It was none other than Basara, who made Hasegawa worried. Therefore,

"Actually… my father's currently out of the house."

Basara spoke of his own worries as much as he could afford to.

The feelings he couldn't speak out because he didn't want to worry Mio and Maria, or because it would be complaints towards Takigawa--- Toujou Basara's distress.

"I'm the only man in the house, so when something happens, I want to protect Mio and Maria--- Ah, Maria is Mio's little sister."

"Okay…"

Hasegawa's gentle nod urged him to continue, so Basara made a wry smile.

"But it's not that easy… to truly protect something. People are faced with all kinds of worries in life and some of them can't be told to others. When you want to protect them despite that, you also have to keep secrets. But it seems impossible to do everything by myself."

He bit down on his lips and tightly clenched his fists.

"I want to protect them. Whatever may be, I definitely want to protect them… But I once again realized how hard it is to properly protect something you want to protect. My own strength and existence seems so small and unreliable."

He didn't really think he could pull off everything just fine. But if he managed to protect them, even in whatever unsightly shape, he wouldn't complain. Because whatever might happen, he would just exert all of his strength.

"…But."

Being unable to protect them --- thoughts like these made Basara feel like going crazy. He never wanted to lose something precious again, to never repeat the regret and pain from five years again. There,

"……You're taking too much upon yourself."

Hasegawa, who had silently listened so far, opened her mouth.

"I somewhat could understand your worry. And also that you don't want to worry Naruse and her younger sister because of it… But, when you're treasuring your new family, your little sisters, then you should properly communicate with them."

After all,

"If it's something you absolutely don't want to lose, you need to properly grasp and understand the situation and position you're in. The most important thing for that is the cooperation and mutual trust between the protector and protected. Once you have that, you can start to come up with an actual counter-measure. But you know--- It's mostly impossible to accomplish everything perfectly. So you set your priorities and draw a line from where you won't back off at all costs, and just protect that no matter what."

"A line from where I won't back off at all costs…"

"Yes. For example, you certainly have to keep secrets, but it's not the secrets you're supposed to protect. Toujou--- closely think about what it is that you truly want to protect, once again."

What he truly wanted to protect --- He ruminated those words that Hasegawa spoke out in his heart.

"……I understand. I'll do so."

When Basara affirmed, Hasegawa nodded, satisfied, with a "Good".

---In the next moment, Toujou Basara was kissed on the cheek.

"Eh---?"

When his thoughts stopped due to this sudden event,

"…blessing and guidance…for the future of…"

Hasegawa removed her lips from his cheek and he heard her mumbling something. He inadvertently became dumbfounded.

"S- Sensei…?"

"Ah, sorry, it was a reflex… It's a little charm in the countryside I'm from."

Don't worry about it--- smiling with that, Hasegawa removed her hands from Basara and started to walk.

Even if it was on the cheek, a kiss was a kiss. He had thought for sure that there was something behind it, but apparently there really was no deep meaning to it, judging by how relieved he felt.

Therefore, Basara went after Hasegawa and walked next to her, matching her pace.

While thinking about--- what he truly wanted to protect and the line from where he wouldn't back off at all costs.

Part 3

After parting with Basara and Hasegawa, Takigawa Yahiro headed in a different direction than his house.

It was a sport grounds in a somewhat tasteless area between a sewage plant and an industrial waste treatment plant.

In the middle of the lawn on the grounds--- Takigawa stood still all alone.

The grounds were dark, since the opening hours were long over, and no one else was there. However,

"…Took you long enough."

Suddenly a throaty voice called out to him from behind.

"My bad. There are a lot of customs I have to follow when acting like a human."

Takigawa turned around to the voice. Upon that, there stood a devil in front of him that was so big that he had to look up. Just the presence of this huge stature gave off an intimidating air.

"To think the reinforcement would be you--- Vargar."

"What do you mean by that, Lars? Got a problem with me?"

Takigawa, called by his devil name, shrugged his shoulders with "Not really…".

---The other day Takigawa had filed a report about the incident with Mio letting Wilbert's power go out of control, to the current Devil Lord faction. It had three main points.

First, Mio temporarily released Wilbert's power, but it didn't awaken fully.

Second, the surveillance from the Hero Tribe through Yuki.

And third--- The previous Hero Basara had become Mio's current family.

It would be troublesome when the Hero Tribe interfered at worst. Takigawa had thought for sure that the top brass would peacefully advance things by observing the situation for a while, but of all things, they sent over the aggressive fighter Valgar. It seemed the top brass only saw that Wilbert's power sleeping in Mio was starting to awaken. And as expected,

"---Now then, I shall have a look at the target."

Valgar tried to make a move at once.

"Hey, hey. Selfishly going out all of a sudden, you must be joking. You just got here and don't even know what's going on, so where do you think you're going so nonchalant?"

"Huh? That's why I'm going to check on the situation. Got a problem?"

"I'm telling you to not act on your own. You're just additional staff, a support to my mission. It's only natural you listen to me, your superior."

"I don't give a crap. The higher-ups sent me here, knowing my personality. That basically means I can do what I want."

Heh, Valgar smiled.

"You're so positive… I could do without that manliness of yours though."

There Takigawa suddenly turned his expression into a serious one.

"You should have read the report. The Hero Tribe is already on the move. If you carelessly agitate them, they start to mobilize full-blown, and if something happens to Naruse Mio--- the top brass will kill you."

"Hey, hey. Don't be so scary, Lars. It's not like I wanna pull something right off the bat. But a former Hero became family with Naruse Mio and took her side, right? Then I ought to know the situation accurately."

Saying so, Valgar disappeared along with the wind.

"Geez…"

With Valgar's personality, it wouldn't end with only checking upon her. Takigawa considered going after him, whereupon

"---Please wait."

Suddenly a new voice came from the side. When Takigawa shifted his gaze there, the airspace bent and a beautiful female devil appeared from the empty space. Takigawa offhanded stiffened his expression on her appearance.

"…I only know of one reinforcement."

"Indeed. After all, I am not your reinforcement."

"Then--- what's the reason for Sir Zolgear's right hand herself to appear here?"

Yes. In front of Takigawa stood the subordinate of Zolgear--- the high-class devil that had observed Mio. Her name was Zest. The one Zolgear had the most trust in, both in intelligence and strength.

"Sir Zolgear was already relieved of his duty to observe Naruse Mio. Even if you're just his subordinate, you didn't selfishly approach the target without the Lord's approval, did you?"

"Of course not. Before the Lord relieved him of his surveillance duties, my master Zolgear had already done his preparations. You, Lars… should know of that."

Indeed. When Zolgear was relieved of his duty, he set up a trap for Naruse Mio.

And--- this trap was still existent. Takigawa still hadn't told Basara about this fact.

It was a circumstances he couldn't talk about carelessly.

"It has been more than half a year in this world since then, and I came here to check if the arrangements are still in effect now---- I properly got the permission from the Lord."

Therefore, Zest said.

"For that, I need to accurately confirm the situation from when my master Zolgear was relieved off his duty until now. You will assist me, right Lars?"

Takigawa clicked his tongue on her cold eyes.

…Not good.

When she investigated, at worst he wouldn't just get under suspicion, he would be totally exposed. He had carefully taken precautionary measures so that a third party wouldn't find about him teaming up with Basara, but this was different than with a simple guy like Volgar. Zest wasn't Zolgear's right hand just for show.

Moreover--- Takigawa didn't mention Basara's <Banishing Shift> in his report. If that were to get known, Basara's existence would surely be deemed dangerous. Because there was no guarantee that a skill that could banish everything, wouldn't banish Wilbert's power sleeping inside Mio.

Due to that, Takigawa didn't tell that to the other side he was working for either. There were still many parts about Basara's skill that Takigawa himself didn't know. If he reported carelessly, it would complicate the situation instead. Above all, he couldn't let Basara die just yet. Therefore,

"My mission is just to observe Naruse Mio… I have no reason, nor obligation to work for Sir Zolgear." Takigawa tried to play dumb.

"I did not come on Sir Zolgear's instructions. I am here by his Lord's order. So I believe you have a reason and obligation to comply."

Or, said Zest, suddenly narrowing her eyes.

"---Do you have some kind of reason that keeps you from assisting me?"

So that was how she was going to play. If that was the case. Takigawa changed his plan.

"Nah, no way. I will gladly offer my assistance in that case."

He grinned at Zest. No matter how much he complained, Zest would surely act on her own anyway. Instead of having her get closer to the truth, it was better to be the guide himself and keep her away from the troublesome truth. He was also concerned about Valgar's actions, but

…Well, good luck, Basacchi.

After all--- he had to take care of an even more troublesome fellow now.

Part 4

Basara arrived at home around ten in the night.

Since the stuff in the bath happened with Mio, Basara headed to his own room only with Maria for now.

And then they conducted a discussion about what to do from now on, including his newly surfaced worries.

First he asked about the merits and demerits of the Master and Servant Contract. Upon that,

"Indeed--- Like you have said, the Master and Servant Contract has both it's advantages and risks."

While facing each other with the table in-between them, Maria, sitting on a cushion, made a diligent expression.

"But the current Devil Lord faction is not after Mio-sama's life, but after Wilbert-sama's power itself. Since it would trouble them when Mio-sama dies, the thing we have to be cautious about it---"

"---A kidnapping."

Even if they couldn't kill her, it was possible that they abducted her and forcefully awakened her power by using magic or magic tools. Maria nodded with "Yes".

"However the Master and Servant Contract allows the Master and Servant, who have linked their souls, to locate each other when they want, so it is easier to guard, but it also makes it possible to come to one's rescue when abducted. The reason I had you two form the contract was to have a precautionary measure for such kidnappings."

The enemy certainly couldn't afford to let Mio die, so more importantly than the risk of having something happen to Mio because her curse activates from the guilt of being kidnapped, it was to not have her get abducted at all. And even if she were to get kidnapped, they ought to think how to save her.

---In fact, Mio tried to solve things all by herself the other day, as to not drag anyone else into it, when Basara suffered a severe wound in the fight with the masked Takigawa on the rooftop of the school.

And the reason Basara somehow could make it in time for Mio's dilemma was that he could locate Mio due to the Master and Servant Contract. Of course Takigawa had anticipated Basara's arrival back then and purposefully took his time, so that Basara would make it in time.

---However, from now on, it wouldn't go like that. According to Takigawa, a new observer for Mio was dispatched.

"I get it… But Maria, why didn't you tell us so then?"

Including the case of hiding the matter with the curse, she was being way too secretive. Upon that,

"I am sorry… Considering Mio-sama's personality, I believed it was wiser not to mention it." said Maria.

"Mio-sama may not be all that honest, but she is genuinely kind and above all, very earnest. The instant effective merit of being able to locate each other aside, if I had told her that both your powers would level up when her trust in you increases, she would have unreasonably tried to do something about it and thus screwed it up instead."

"…Sounds plausible."

Mio was different from Basara, who had trained as a Hero from a young age on. Until her foster parents were killed half a year ago, she lived as a normal girl. To tell Mio to handle her emotions objectively was absurd and impossible. So instead of carelessly telling her the truth, Maria must have thought that it was wiser to wait for her trust to develop naturally. But,

"Then you could have at least told me… Well, we haven't been together for long, so it might be difficult to blindly trust me."

"Oh no, I perfectly trust you, Basara-san."

"But," said Maria.

"If Mio-sama were to find out later that only we two knew about it while she was left out, it is possible that she would lose all trust in both you and me."

Before, when the living together with Mio and Maria was decided, Jin knew all about their true identities and aims, but stayed quiet and pretended to be deceived. Precisely because of that--- Basara and the girls could repair their once broken relationship after finding out that fact. The reason Maria kept quiet about all kind of facts regarding the contract was surely out of her consideration for Basara and even more so, for Mio.

"Therefore I would have liked to keep it hidden from you two, but… I never expected that you would investigate about the contract, Basara-san."

A miscalculation, said Maria.

"Either way, where did you hear this from, Basara-san? The power enhancement from a deepening trust aside, the information about some high-class devils using the succubus characteristic in the contract for fun should be only known to very few devils."

"Well, I have my ways… I'm a former Hero after all. Even if I was chased out of the <village>, I still have one contact or the other."

Since he couldn't tell her about Takigawa, Basara said it in a roundabout way to hide the truth.

"But I guess it's better to keep the contract for now then… We have to make our plans with that in mind."

"---Please leave it to me, Basara-san. This may sound pretentious, but I came up with the best plan for this situation." Maria expressed her approval.

"Please come this way."

Saying so, she invited Basara over to the back of the room--- to in front of the computer. He sat down on the chair and naturally faced the PC monitor on the desk, whereupon

"Now excuse me." "H- Hey, what are you…!"

Maria lowered her waist onto Basara's lap, who was bewildered. She must have taken her bath already. Maria wore a defenseless attire of just a pajama at the top and shorts below. Basara regretted his own decision to change into a T-shirt with matching shorts when he came home and anticipated their discussion to be long. The supple material of the shorts Maria was wearing and her smooth thighs--- Both of these were strongly emphasizing that Maria was a girl. Her body washed with body soap gave off a sweet fragrance, which only her body could produce with her body temperature.

"Do you like it? The smell of a girl fresh out of the bath."

Like she had seen through his inner turmoil, Maria turned around in his lap. Maria pressed her bottom onto his groin area and fidgeted around.

"N- Not really… Anyway, get off!"

"No. What we will do now is something necessary for Mio-sama and you."

Saying so, Maria started up Basara's computer.

"Hey, don't---"

Maria skilfully operated the mouse and opened a folder on the hard drive, starting a program that Basara had never seen before.

The started software first showed the designer logo in English. And as soon as he saw the next scene, Basara inadvertently widened his eyes. He had only seen it for a moment, but

"Maria… Are my eyes playing a trick on me? I think I just saw 'This game is a product of fiction' written there."

"Oh please, Basara-san. All game software are basically a product of fiction."

Yeah, right. He wouldn't deny that.

"But the next line saying 'Scenes of the game re-enacted in reality are punishable by law'----"

Basara said along with a bad feeling, whereupon it was finally displayed in front of his eyes.

It was a cute girl. But regretfully there were a lot of instances, where he wanted to retort to the girl.

First, why was she wearing a leather collar with a chain?

Second, why was she wearing no clothes, except suggestive underwear?

Third, why was she embraced by a man from behind?

And above all, why was the girl looking at him with wet eyes from ecstasy, even though she was in such a situation?

All these questions were resolved right away. Because the displayed title taught him.

"Youth Special Edition: My real little stepsister and I"--- It was an erotic game.

"The heck are you installing on my computer without my permission!"

Are you stupid? Or rather, that's the game that was snuck into my bed without my knowledge for a supposedly moving gift. The morning of that day was the worst morning of my life, in the ranking in my head. Basara cursed in his mind.

"I understand your resentment towards this game, Basara-san. However, please bear with it. This is also for Mio-sama's sake."

"No, I don't really have any grudges with this game."

Only with the criminal, namely you, who placed a landmine in my bed.

"Actually, how is this game for Mio's sake…"

"I told you that considering the future, it takes priority to deepen the trust between Mio-sama and you. If that happens naturally, it would be ideal, but the enemy will not wait and you ended up knowing various things about the contract. So we can only try for the best in this situation."

In other words,

"We will increase Mio-sama's trust in you so much that it will not cause any problems when she later finds out about the circumstances--- That is to say, you will become an absolute Master to her. An existence Mio-sama would never oppose, not even consider opposing and vowed her loyalty to from the bottom of her heart. For an obstinate girl like Mio-sama, there is a limit to how much you can make her open up her heart with just kindness. This software serves as a reference to how you can discipline Mio-sama."

"…Sorry. This is a good occasion, so I'll tell you something I thought for a while now--- You're an idiot, right?"

"Oh my. We have to fight the current Devil Lord faction, even though we lack in battle strength, so I get the feeling that trying to resolve the situation with a pretty frontal attack is far more stupid. You do not mean to say that we have the leisure to choose our methods, do you, Basara-san?"

"No… But, we can't forget about Mio. Her feelings are important in the matter."

"Indeed, they are. However, if you had to choose between Mio-sama's feelings or her life--- I am sure the answer is obvious."

"That's… But what about laws and morals?"

"Will Mio-sama be protected when you tell the country or laws--- the police or court 'Please help us, we are being chased by the Devil Lord'? Please do not forget, the only ones that can protect Mio-sama right now are you and me. Only us two."

"……Yeah. Sorry."

Basara said with a low tone.

"But even so, I'm doubtful about using a game as a reference… Disciplining Mio isn't the only option to deepen the trust, is it?"

"It is not like there is no other, but the curse is an aphrodisiac. Would you not say it is wiser to make use of that? Besides, I am not telling you to do it exactly like in the game. At best, we are just looking for hints to deepen your relationship with Mio-sama."

Saying so, Maria handed him the manual of the game. Basara somehow read out the outline of what was written in there.

"'Your little stepsister got a sex up curse from a devil. Her new cuteness makes her the target of the guys around her. To protect her, you, the protagonist, have to change her into your ideal girl. When the bonds between you two deepen, you should be able to overcome all kind of obstacles. That is the ultimate form of familial love. Let's discipline the little stepsister~'… What has the world come to!"

"Here, Basara-san, earphones. Because the same sentence can have a different meaning depending on the tone and expression. I want to assist you, so I will take one earphone."

"Eh? I'm going to play this game while I share the earphones with you on my lap?"

Seriously? Literally and imaginary, that was the worst state.

"Please bear with it. It is for Mio-sama."

"……Fine, whatever."

And then the lesson started with Maria on his lap. The prologue of the game alone took 30 minutes and main characters' upbringing, current circumstances and feelings for each other were not explained by simple narration, but was properly portrayed through a drama of their life. At the end of the prologue--- An anime part with the theme song played, where the little stepsister got cursed and the protagonist and heroine decided to go down the forbidden path, because even though it was wrong, they had no other choice.

But the main part started now. Finally welcoming their first night, the two were having an awkward conversation, then the first option screen was already shown.

{|style="border: 1px solid #aaa; padding: .5em; margin-left: 10px;font-size: 100%;" |align="left"| 1/ Relief her nervousness by behaving like always

2/ Be a really nice gentleman

3/ You shouldn't be half-assed, since you know your sister's resolve. To respond to her feelings, you'll be rough and forceful with your love. You have no regrets. Because you believe---- that it's your responsibility as her family, as her older stepbrother. |}

"…The heck's up with #3. Instead of an option, I only see it as a joke."

Were the staff all idiots?

"Now then, please choose the option you deem fitting. Show me your skills, Basara-san. Ah, but please save just in case. We might have to load later on."

Maria on his lap said so, totally used to erotic games even though she was a devil.

…But showing his skills was easier said than done.

Thinking rationally, the answer was already decided. Basara chose number 1. At that moment,

"Ah, I knew it." "What? Got a problem?"

Maria said disappointed, whereas Basara asked.

"Ah, I am sorry. Just a reflex… P- Please continue."

While he felt that she wasn't satisfied with his choice, Basara started to go through the text. The heroine nodded approving to the protagonist, who wanted to take things slowly and in order. I won't do anything, but let's sleep together tonight. It's been a while. While such a conversation unfolded, the scene ended. And on the next day,

"…Huh?"

When the protagonist woke up, the heroine was gone. Instead there was a letter. In the letter it was noted that the heroine apparently had made a bet with the devil to see if the protagonist would show courage, and she lost that bet, so she was going to be the plaything for the devils in hell now, but she was happy to be treated so kindly by the protagonist until the end.

Then the screen turned black. The words BAD END were displayed.

"…What kind of development is that?"

"You cannot tell? This is a tragedy caused by your kindness, Basara-san. It means a man cannot protect a woman with only kindness. Good grief… You are so deplorable that I am going to cry."

"I don't want to be called that just because of a single choice in an erotic game--- Actually, when 1 is already no good for kindness, then 2 as well?"

"Obviously! Do you want to kill the heroine that bad? I did not expect you to push on this all too grotesque option. Were your parents killed by her in your previous life, or something?"

"Wait. How are you imagining my previous life?"

A previous life, where the heroine of an erotic game killed my parents, was just too miserable.

"Geez, you are so hopeless…"

Maria sighed, then overlapped her small hand with Basara's, which was grabbing the mouse.

"---Now then, let us save her."

Saying so, she loaded the earlier save data. Through exclusion, Basara chose option 3 and resumed the game. However, even though Maria had been so confident, the heroine in the game was bewildered by the protagonist, whose attitude had suddenly changed, and resisted heavily.

"See. It wasn't 3 after all."

"Come again? Please take a closer look."

When he looked at the text window on the screen like he was told, the supposedly resisting heroine had suddenly become submissive and accepted the discipline from the protagonist. Not just that, she somewhat felt pleasure and happiness from being treated forcefully.

"Listen, Basara-san. This heroine included--- All obstinate girls are basically hardcore masochists when you bring them out of their shells."

"What nonsense are you saying out of the blue!?"

"No, it is a fact. Therefore, please forcefully bring Mio-sama out of her shell. You have nothing to worry about. She will only resist in the beginning. After all, Mio-sama is actually quite the masochist, according to my evaluation. She is the type that feels happiness from being treated forcefully by the one she devoted herself to and draws pleasure from submitting to that person despite that."

"What's with that harsh analysis!? Are you really her retainer?"

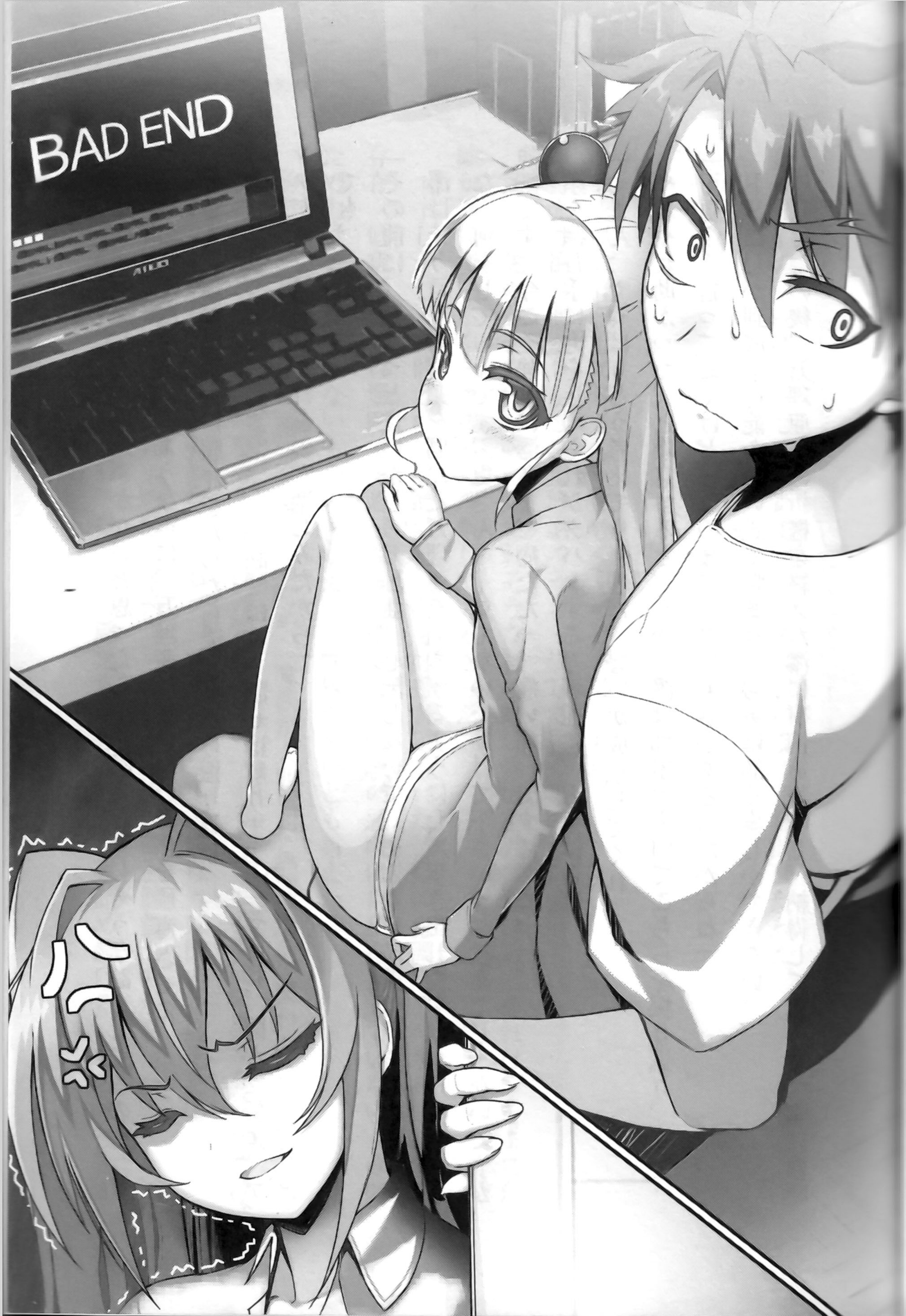
"Precisely because I am her retainer, I want Mio-sama to be true to herself without putting on a front."

Maria proudly puffed up her chest.

"Well then, Basara-san, let us continue. You are going to learn the right way to discipline your little stepsister, so that you can make an unshakable bond with Mio-sama as fast as possible."

Saying so, Maria faced her head towards the monitor again--- where it was grabbed by an extended hand over Basara's shoulder.

Basara froze up and looked up, whereupon there stood, unknown since when, Mio with a cold smile.


BAD END

"I wondered why there was no reply when I knocked numerous times… But it seems you had quite the interesting conversation."

Maria's body went rigid on that uttered chilly voice.

And she turned around while instantly breaking out a cold sweat,

"Mio-sama…" "…Yes?" "Let… Let me explain." "Yeah, go on. I'm curious what you'll tell me."

But,

"Do you have a minute before that, Maria? Don't worry, it won't take long."

Mio said so and walked away, dragging Maria along at her head.

"Wh- What are you doing, Basara-san… Stop looking and please help me. Did I not teach you? To be forceful. Now is the time to forcefully take Mio-samoww, ouch, it hurts, Mio-sama."

Maria struggled when the pressure in the hold on her head was increased, whereas Basara put his hands together in a prayer.

"Forgive me. It's just impossible. Sorry, but rest in peace."

He sighed with "Phew, saved", but Mio turned around to him at the door.

"Basara… Just to tell you, you're next."

Glared at with sharp eyes that could only be labelled as super sadistic, Basara could only nod.

And afterwards, it took quite some time to explain the circumstances to Mio and have her understand, after she finished her lecture with Maria. They were difficult hours that reminded them the value of life.

Part 5

There was something that gradually became darker proportional to the night.

A place all the moonlight or streetlights of the world would never reach.

Darkness. People avoided the pitch-black darkness, where they couldn't see ahead and seemed to get sucked in. Because they instinctively understood that danger lurked there.

---However, there were those that loved the darkness, in contrast to humans. They, who tried to make the dark abyss their habitat, the low-class stray devils. Even amongst the devils, low-class devils had no ego. It was said that because of that they had no considerable powers, but instead an ill-nature.

To avoid an all-out-war with the Heroes, the devils didn't excessively attack humans in the human world, but the low-class devils lacked the intelligence to process that. They only had a desire loyal to their instincts.

And in this night, when everything except convenience stores, family restaurants or fast-food stores had closing time.

Something arose from the darkness in a back alley in the corner of the shopping district.

That "something" blended in with the darkness and kept staring at the main street from the dark back alley. Just like it was waiting for it's prey to pass by. And then--- The moment when a young woman passed by before it.

The stray devil mercilessly attacked the woman. A human without any special abilities could not see a devil. And while a stray devils was weak compared to devils, it was far superior to an average human.

Thus the woman had no way to oppose and became the stray devil's prey just like that--- or was supposed to.

---However, in the next moment, a suddenly released slash cut off the stray devil life and existence itself. It most likely didn't even realize that it was erased. The remains of the stray devil vanished into empty space.

"---I knew it, a lot are attracted."

A voice said so by spitting out a "Heh". At the same time, three silhouette emerged from the darkness in the back alley--- from behind where the stray devil had been. They were two young men and one girl.

"Was that wise, Takashi? With a victim, we would have gotten a reason to terminate the 'target'."

To the right a young man who said with a casual tone, the young man called Takashi---- The one, who slayed the stray devil, said with a displeased low tone.

"There's no need to unnecessarily increase the victims. Shiba-san, the <village> has already made their decision."

One breath,

"To change the 'target'--- Naruse Mio from a surveillance target into a termination target."

That was the decision of the Hero Tribe, who received Yuki's report the other day. In light of the danger of the possible awakening of the power of the previous Devil Lord, they concluded so.

In other words, the daughter of the previous Devil Lord--- Naruse Mio was to be terminated.

"…Besides, how could we allow a victim to fall before us? We are from the Hero Tribe."

"You're so earnest, Takashi… Geez, working for justice is such a pain."

Shiba shrugged his shoulders jokingly.

"---Don't you agree, Kurumi-chan?"

He called out to the girl, who stood on the opposite side of him with Takashi in-between them and wordlessly stared at the empty space into which the stray devil had disappeared.

"…No. It's our mission."

In regards, the girl called Kurumi answered bluntly.

"How rare… for the two of you to make a stiff expression."

While Shiba made a wry smile,

"Are you that bothered by it? That he--- Basara is involved with this case?

Takashi and Kurumi remained silent to these uttered words for a while. Directed at them, "Well, you're a childhood friends with him, close in age. Before the incident five years ago, you have always been together. I'm sure you have special feelings for it and it'll be tough for you in all kind of ways."

But,

"We volunteered for this mission despite having heard the report from Yuki-chan. Please don't ruin the mission by getting swayed from some weird attachment."

"…You don't need to tell me."

said Takashi.

"I'll kill Naruse Mio and show no mercy to those who interfere. Even if it's Basara."

"…Same for me. I no longer have a reason to hesitate about Basara."

There was no doubt in Kurumi's utterance. Because she already had taken an influential different path than Basara--- Ever since the day "five years ago". Toward these two,

"Good. Your emotions are your own. I'm not going to pry into them. Because I'm just a supervisor this time. You two will do the job. I'll just watch."

While smiling a "It's up to you",

"Well then, let's go. To fulfill our duty as Heroes, the protectors of the world---" Shiba Kyouichi declared.

"---To kill the one that might become the next Devil Lord."

Holding heightening Feelings

Part 1

Eating delicious Yakiniku with Takigawa and the school nurse Hasegawa.

Then made to play an erotic game by Maria, which Mio got wind of and fiercely scolded them for it. Now the next day.

At the Hijirigasaka Academy during lunch break, Toujou Basara was surrounded.

It took place at the deserted backside of the school building with the inner courtyard. With his back to the wall, more than ten male students stood so that he couldn't escape. Since Takigawa was absent from school today, Basara had headed for the school store alone at lunch break, where he was intercepted with "You're Toujou, right?" in the hallway, like a detective found his suspect. Before he could even nod, both his arms were grabbed and he was dragged away. Well, Basara himself wanted to confirm something, so he didn't mind that, but

"Uhm… Do you need something from me?"

Since they were his seniors, Basara asked with a polite tone.

…So I say, but,

He could mostly guess why it came to this. Naruse Mio, his little stepsister, and Nonaka Yuki, his childhood friend. Both his classmates as well, they were something like idols in the school, respectively called "Princess Mio" and "Princess Yuki". Since Basara only transferred here recently, he didn't know much about the affairs at school, but according to Takigawa, they even had some passionate fans. And,

"It seems you're living together with Princess Mio… I hope you're not doing anything funny to her?"

"We heard our Princess Yuki hugged you, but are you really just childhood friends?"

Two guys, apparently each the leader of the Mio and Yuki factions, asked him that. These words were surely based on the fact that they considered Mio and Yuki to be theirs.

…Still, such guys were really around, huh.

The lively type, the serious type, the rustic type and the slightly frivolous type. There truly was a rich variation amongst Mio and Yuki's fans. But right now these guys were one at heart. The looks filled with hostility aimed at him told him, that hard and fast.

That said, these eyes weren't of someone, who was manipulated or lost one's sanity.

…A man's jealousy wasn't to be underestimated, but this should work out.

Extreme emotions gave openings that were easily exploited. Basara had once checked out what kind of guys were Mio and Yuki's fans, since it was thinkable that they were manipulated by the enemy devils that were after Mio, and at least the guys in front of him weren't a problem.

---Well, considering Mio's future, it would be safer to dissolve these groups.

And--- Basara, even in his current state, could overwhelm this number of ordinary guys.

Basara confirmed the position and breathing of the male students in front of him and simulated their action in his mind.

He would knock out the nearest guy by stepping one step forward and ram his palm into his chin, then he would make the dumbfounded guys on the right and left faint with a strike to the abdomen. During the opening due to the other flinching, he would move forward, where he would make use of the charge from the opponent, who finally started moving, on the very right and throw him to the left. There he would collapse into two others. Closing the distance to the remaining five at once with a top speed, he would use the knee of the stiffed up guy in front of him for a jump. Extending his jump by kicking the back of the guy's head with his sole of the foot, he would land behind the two leaders, who stood at the farthest back, and knock them out with a strike of the side of the hands to their necks. Seeing their leaders collapse onto the ground, the last two guys would lose their will to fight. With a light threat then, he could make them give up on Mio and Yuki. But,

…That's certainly going too far.

Basara was no longer a Hero that prioritized his mission over anything else. He had decided to protect Mio, but only as a family. And above all, Basara had no right to deny the love of these guys in front of him. No guy beside Takigawa would really talk to him, even under normal circumstances. If he were to make a wrong choice here, it wouldn't be as bad as in the game he played with Maria last night, but it would worsen his isolation and give his high school life that had only just started a BAD END, giving him the secret slogan "Forever Alone". Thus, staying docile without running away would be for the better. Knowing the attitude he was supposed to take, Basara stayed silent, whereupon

"Hey, say something…!"

As expected, one guy, losing his temper, tried to grab Basara.

"Mh? What are you guys doing there?"

Suddenly a voice came from above. On a look, there was one male teacher looking down from the passage on the second floor.

It was Sakasaki Mamoru, the homeroom teacher of Basara's class. Seeing him, the male students

"Tch… We ain't doing anything."

saying so with a click of their tongue, then leaving together, leaving Basara behind. Apparently they would let him off the hook this time. Sakasaki watched after them, then

"Geez, Naruse and Nonaka's fan sure are out to get you, Toujo."

"Yeah, well… Guess so."

Basara looked up to Sakasaki after giving an agreeable response.

"But you saved me, Sensei. Thank you."

"I didn't do anything. Actually I should have given them a proper warning, but I wouldn't want your situation to get any worse because of it."

Sakasaki said with a wry smile.

"But if they do something to you… no, if it seems they'll do something to you, then tell me right away."

"…Yes. Thank you."

When Basara replied with a nod, Sakasaki said "See you" and disappeared into the passage.

"Now then… I gotta hurry to the store."

He didn't really want to attend the afternoon classes without having had lunch. He headed there in hope that something wasn't sold out yet.

"---Basara."

A calm voice called him to a halt. The girl appearing from the shadows of the tree in the inner courtyard was

"Yuki… I see. You called the teacher."

"Mm, because I thought it would be better than coming out myself."

Yuki nodded. Indeed, some of them were fans of Yuki. Before making things more complicated by having Yuki carelessly cover for Basara, it was better to have Sakasaki, a third party, to intervene.

"Thanks for the help… What's up?"

His childhood friend stared at him silently, whereas Basara asked.

"…Actually, I have a favour to ask, so I looked for you."

"A favour? Why so formally…"

"I want you to accompany me somewhere on the coming weekend… Are you busy then, Basara?"

"No… I have nothing planned."

Upon that, Yuki said "I'm glad" and grabbed the sleeve of his uniform tightly.

Then Yuki said with a quiet, yet clear tone.

"It's a date then, Basara--- with just the two of us."

Part 2

And now it was Saturday morning.

Leaving the house, Basara headed for the meeting place with Yuki under the sky with the perfect weather for a date.

The arranged time was 10 o'clock in front of the station. He arrived ten minutes early, but Yuki was already there.

"Morning, Basara."

Since it was a holiday, Yuki wore casual clothes. He had only seen her in her school uniform so far, so the casual clothes gave Yuki fresh novelty. That said, her personality was showing in the choice of her clothes. The plain arrangement, including a slightly dark cardigan, embodied Yuki's docile personality.

---However, Yuki's clear complexion wasn't something that could be subdued by plain clothes. In fact, a lot of the passing by people were inadvertently captivated by Yuki for a while now. Amongst them, some even stopped. Basara felt a slightly bit superior.

"Morning, Yuki… I thought I would be the first here, but I guess I made you wait?"

"No. I only arrived here shortly before too."

Yuki shook her head to the sides.

"Shortly before--- Since when?" "…One hour ago." "Eh… that early?"

Man, that was too early. So much that he was no longer happy about her waiting for him, but felt guilty instead.

"At least give me a call. I would've come earlier too then."

"It's fine. I wanted to wait for you."

"Well, okay, if you're fine with it… But Yuki, call me next time when you're too early. Because I don't really want to make people wait for me."

"Next time…"

Mumbling a repeat like parrot, Yuki brightened up her expression a bit.

"…Okay. Will do so next time." "Yeah, please do. Okay, let's go then."

Saying so, Yuki and Basara started walking towards the ticket gate of the station. Their destination was the shopping district downtown.

Because it was a holiday, the platform was crowded with people, who wanted to go downtown like them, after they passed through the ticket gates. They lined up in a relative short line and the train entered the station soon enough.

However, the train was already packed and when Basara and Yuki boarded the train, the passenger count naturally increased. All seats were occupied and there were no free handrails or straps either, but Basara somehow managed to get to the door that connected two wagons together with Yuki.

Yuki leaned her back against the door and Basara somehow got into a posture of standing shielding in front of her. Even so the available space within the wagon was limited, which made their bodies get into direct contact if they wanted or not.

…Ugh, this is…

A lucky--- no, quite the unfavourable posture. A part of his true feelings were showing through.

But he couldn't help but feel the warmth and softness of Yuki's body and her sweet fragrance.

"Ehm… Are you okay, Yuki?"

Because the train started moving, Basara asked while turning a bit red.

"I'm fine. And you…?" "Me as we---ll!?"

On the clattering shaking of the train, the crowd leaning onto Basara's back pushed him forward.

"Ah…" "S- Sorry!"

Yuki turned red along with a short voice, whereas Basara hastily apologized. They were in direct contact anyhow, yet they got into an even more unbelievable posture now. His right leg--- more precisely, it's knee had gone between Yuki thighs, spreading them out.

And speaking of thighs, it was perfectly under Yuki's skirt. Actually,

…Uwah, is this…

The soft sensation that pinched his knee from the left and right were surely Yuki's inner thighs.

If so, then the soft sensation on his thigh was

"Mm… Basara, your leg… is touching…" "S- Sorry…!"

An outrageous "It's touching" situation. Every time the train shook lightly, Yuki released a nasal "Mm" voice and lightly trembled her body with a shiver.

It was an disturbance beyond awkward.

Basara tried to somehow pulled his leg back, but since someone was behind him, leaving no space, it was pushed forward right away again. Not giving up, he repeated that procedure numerous times, whereupon Yuki tightly clung to his chest. While flushing her cheeks embarrassed, she had shifted her gaze downwards.

"B- Basara… all your movements… have been rubbing against it."

The words were declared with a frail voice. Understanding the meaning behind them, Basara's heartbeat accelerated at once.

"---S- Sorry! That wasn't what I… Wh- What should I do?"

"Just stay still… Mm, then I think… it'll be fine."

"O- Okay--- Anything else I can do?"

"…Put your arms… around my back… and hold me for a bit."

"---Eh? Wh- Why…?"

"Because my body is being pressed against the door… It's a bit painful."

Ah, right. Then he had no choice. He had no choice in this case… hadn't he.

"O- Okay, excuse me then…"

Like Yuki asked him to, Basara entwined his arms around her back and hugged her.

Upon that, there opened a small gap between Yuki's back and the door.

"A- And?" "Mm… A bit better."

On these words, Basara made a sigh of relief, but his heartbeat didn't calm down.

Yuki's body was warm, soft and gave off a sweet fragrance--- And above all:

Toujou Basara's right leg was still between Nonaka Yuki's thighs.

There were people spying on Basara and Yuki from the next wagon.

Right after Basara had left the house, two people had followed him secretly--- Mio and Maria.

"Hugging each other in the train, these two are already acting like a stupid couple."

"……………"

"What do we do, Mio-sama? For now we should keep--- Mio-sama?"

"……………"

"Mio-sa--- Oww!? Ouch. Mio-sama, that is not the handrail, but my wrist. My wrist, you hear!?"

"H- Hoho. He said he would go out with Nonaka, but he's doing that inside the train."

While cladding herself with composure as much as possible, Mio clenched her right hand as much as possible.

"Hiii. Please calm down, Mio-sama! At this rate my wrist will break!"

Maria cornered voice didn't reach Mio's ears.

After all, on the other side beyond two doors, Basara was embracing Yuki.

---Basara told her that he would go out with Yuki at dinner last night.

When he asked "May I?", she couldn't say no. Sure, Mio and Basara were family and he promised to protect her. And they even formed a Master and Servant Contract, albeit in a different way than intended. However, Mio didn't have the right to restrain Basara 24/7 just because of that. But,

…I, I have the right to worry.

It wasn't like she was planning to interrupt Basara and Yuki's date. A lot had happened between Yuki and Mio due to their positions, but through the battles on the rooftop and the park with the white mask, they came to understand each other a little bit.

However, Yuki was too assertive on the weirdest things. Like suddenly hugging Basara on their reunion or coming into their house in the morning and storming into the bath with Basara in it. It wasn't unthinkable that she would do even more unbelievable actions if she were to be all alone with him.

So her tailing was a justified pursuit. The other day, the curse activated from her jealousy when she thought about Basara being all alone with Yuki, but now there was no problem--- In other words,

"Yes… There's no doubt. I'm not jealous… or anything."

"Yes, I understand! You are only worried about Basara-san! So, Mio-sama, please relax your grip a bit, okay? My left hand is becoming congested and is turning purple, you know!?"

Mio said mumbling, whereas Maria pleaded with teary eyes. However, the train stopped at a certain station.

"Ah, they're getting off! Like I thought, they're changing trains here. We're going, Maria!"

Chasing after Basara and Yuki, Mio got off the train as well. She tightly grabbed Maria's left hand as not to get separated, whereupon she could hear a short "HGG!!?" shriek from Maria along with a "Crack" noise due to it, but she paid it no mind. With the Master and Servant Contract, she could locate Basara if she wanted, but it wouldn't tell her what he was doing at a different place.

For now, she couldn't afford to take her eyes off Basara and Yuki for even a moment.

Part 3

Transferring once, the train arrived at the destination's station after the scheduled forty minutes.

It was just before noon. Yuki suggested to have lunch first and Basara agreed.

It wasn't like Yuki liked fast food. But she thought that there was no place more benefiting than this for a high school couple eating out.

---Nonaka Yuki, living her life so far as a Hero, didn't know what a normal high schooler was like.

The reason she currently attended a high school in Tokyo was that she had the task to observe the daughter of the previous Lord Devil: Naruse Mio. She simply was here for her mission as a Hero.

…But only for today.

At least only for today--- she wanted to be a normal girl.

It was a city full of youngsters and moreover a holiday, so the store was already crowded.

Yuki wasn't all too comfortable with crowded and noisy places, but the nearby seats were filled with young couples and above all, Basara was stuffing his cheeks with a hamburger across from her. Amidst this situation,

"……." "Mh? Something wrong?"

He might have sensed her restless mood. Basara looked at her puzzled, whereas Yuki shook her head with "No".

She wasn't used to the taste of the hamburger or the fizzing carbonic acid of the cola, but even so Nonaka Yuki tried to savor the taste as an important memory with Basara and her high school self.

When they left the store after their meal, they headed for today's main event--- buying clothes.

Entering a fashion mall that was even famous as a landmark,

"Wow…"

Basara next to her mumbled overwhelmed. Because the mall was filled with girls looking for popular fashions. The loudly playing BGM made it rather lively.

---However, a problem arose. While heading towards the elevators, they briefly passed by the shops, but to be honest, Yuki had no idea where she should go.

…Careless.

She had thought for sure that by coming here, she would naturally find some clothes. The first floor technically had an information booth, but to be honest, she didn't even know what to ask for.

Wavering about what to do, Yuki showed a weakness for the first time here.

"Hello~ Are you looking for something~?"

Suddenly the clerk of a nearby shop called out to her.

Mio watched that scene from a distant.

It must have been an unforeseen situation. Yuki was obviously panicking on the sudden happening. Towards her,

"Excuse me for suddenly calling out to you~ You looked troubled, so I just wanted to help you."

The female shop clerk said so with a carefree smile.

"What are you here for today? You seem kind of hesitant, so are you just looking around without a special aim? If so, why not take a look at our sales? We have stocked up on our new winter collection."

"Ehm… But"

However, Yuki showed hesitation. Because the one who had called out to her was a clerk from a shop that sold mainly street-style clothes in vivid colors.

It wasn't really the type of brand that Yuki liked. As far as Mio knew, Yuki was more of the docile type. She came to the holy land of fashion for youngsters on her date with Basara, but

…She must have been taken for an easy target.

Mio had guessed the aim of the clerk. Yuki obviously gave off an aura that she wasn't used to this place at all.

Like the clerk had said, right now it was the period where the new winter collections started to sell. For the shop it was the most profitable season, so the selling quota got harsher.

Due to that, some clerks wanted to score sales by persistently palming off customers. The female clerk kept talking on and on as to press for an answer.

"It is part of my job to help people dress up, you know? I am sure I can help you. For example, I believe this would suit you perfectly."

Quickly grabbing a hooded jacket from a nearby shelf, she held it up against Yuki's body.

"See~ Totally terrific. It fits with a lot of other clothes, so you can make all kind of arrangements."

Terrific indeed. The shop clerk recommended a shocking pink hooded jacket with lamé.

It was possible that she recommended it, because Yuki was rather meek. Moreover,

"It fits with other clothes, because you want to sell more…"

Starting with the hooded jacket, the clerk likely intended to sell various products as a whole arrangement. Seeing the persistent clerk, Maria next to her said.

"His childhood friend seems troubled, yet Basara-san is not helping her out at all, is he?"

In their field of vision, Basara was scratching his head next to Yuki, not knowing what to do.

"…No, he's trying to offer her help for a while now. But it seems he isn't used to such a place either. The clerk is a woman too, so he doesn't know how to deal with it."

It surely was too much to expect Basara, a boy, to do something that he couldn't even do with Yuki, a girl.

…Well,

Even if Yuki was troubled, it was nothing of Mio's concern. Basara wasn't any better. He was all over Yuki in the train earlier, so… a bit of trouble for him now was just fine.

Mio just watched them from a distance and had no plans to help them. However,

"……." "---Mio-sama?"

Mio heard Maria's question, who was supposed to be next to her, from behind.

Before she noticed it, she had moved forward. Briskly getting in-between Yuki and the clerk,

"Sorry for the wait, Nonaka~!"

she linked arms with Yuki and pulled her away.

"Okay, let's go." "---Eh?"

Yuki was surprised on her sudden appearance. Same for Basara next to her. However, Mio didn't care about that. Pulling on Yuki's arm, she tried to leave the place--- but her supposedly forward moving legs were stopped against her will. The clerk was grabbing Yuki's sleeve,

"Oh, are you her friend? How about you come in together? Your friend just took a liking to her new collection."

The shop clerk certainly was experienced. She wouldn't let go off her prey she got a hold off so easily. Even while her mouth formed a friendly smile, she pinned down Mio with her sharp look. However, Mio showed a friendly smile as well,

"No thanks." "But this" "No thanks" "Hey, at least take a closer look" "No thanks"

When she repeated the same words to the persistent clerk, the clerk let go off Yuki before long. She must have accepted that no matter what she said, she wouldn't sell anything.

How she sent them off with a smile and "Please come by again~" in the end, showed how much of a professional she was.

As soon as Mio got to the elevator area without any shops by still dragging Yuki on her arm,

"---Just to tell you, it's only a coincidence!"

She declared so shouting, after turning around to Basara, who leisurely followed after Yuki.

"Ehm… Mio?"

"It's just by chance! I was shopping with Maria, when I saw you guys by chance. And since you were troubled, I had no choice… Really! It's nothing else but that!"

"Please calm down, Mio-sama. If you get too ruffled, you will dig your own grave."

"---I, I'm not ruffled."

Mio shouted while turning bright red. Not good. Forcing her way in on the spur of the moment was all fine, but she had moved without thinking up an excuse, so she was saying nonsense now.

…But, I mean…

It couldn't be helped. Because her body moved on reflex.

---She probably didn't want to lose to Yuki.

During the battle in the park the other day, Yuki had helped Mio, even though she actually had no obligation to do so. That was the undoubted truth, even if she couldn't forgive that it could have killed Basara. Mio got the feeling that she would lose to her, if she were to ignore the troubled Yuki there despite that.

Yes, it surely was her nature. Naruse Mio didn't want to lose to Nonaka Yuki--- That was all.

"Anyway, thanks. At this rate we would have been persuading into buying… Right, Yuki?"

"……."

Next to Basara, who said so with a sigh, Yuki nodded wordless. Her slightly frustrated expression probably originated more from the negligence of needing help rather than from displeasure of being helped by Mio.

"So, how's it, Yuki? Did any shop catch your eye?"

When Yuki gave no clear answer, Basara softened his expression.

"I see… Then what do you want to do, Yuki? Look around a bit longer?"

Yuki stayed silent on Basara's question. It most likely was a silence of inner conflict, instead of pondering. Upon that, "Uhm… May we accompany you?" "Hey, Maria!?"

Mio raised a flustered voice on the sudden proposal, whereas Maria stayed calm.

"No, I mean, you two are not used to this kind of place, correct? So with Mio-sama with you, you could easily get out of situation like the one earlier."

"Well, yeah, but…"

But Yuki would never give her consent to this, which would interfere with her date.

"What do you say, Yuki…?"

Asked for her opinion by Basara, Yuki stayed silent for a while, then closed her eyes.

"…………Okay."

Before long, she agreed with Maria's proposal like giving up on something.

And when Yuki peacefully opened her eyes, she said by staring at Mio.

"Naruse-san--- if you like, please help me find some clothes."

Mio accepted Yuki's request.

She wasn't all that opposed to helping Yuki. If she were, she wouldn't have saved Yuki from the female clerk earlier.

---Due to that, the shopping went relatively smooth after that.

After hearing her concept, Mio guided Yuki through shops with clothes in the design that matched Yuki's concept.

Skilfully handling the shop clerks, they chose Yuki's clothes together. In the end,

"…Here, what do you say about this?"

Since Yuki didn't know how to put on the clothes properly, Mio had come into the changing room with her and helped her try on the clothes.

Normally that would be the job of a shop clerk, but Yuki asked Mio to help her, probably still affected from the earlier incident with the persistent clerk.

"Yeah… Looks good, really."

While looking at her refined self, Yuki nodded. That her cheeks were lightly flushed was proof that she was satisfied with Mio's choice.

"---Basara, look."

Opening the curtains, Yuki got outside and spun in front of Basara.

"Mh? Hoo… Nice. These kind of clothes suit you too."

Basara inadvertently raised an admiring voice, whereas Yuki softened her expression with an happy "Mm". It was Yuki's expression as a normal girl, which she would never show to Mio.

Upon that, Maria approached Mio and whispered into her ear.

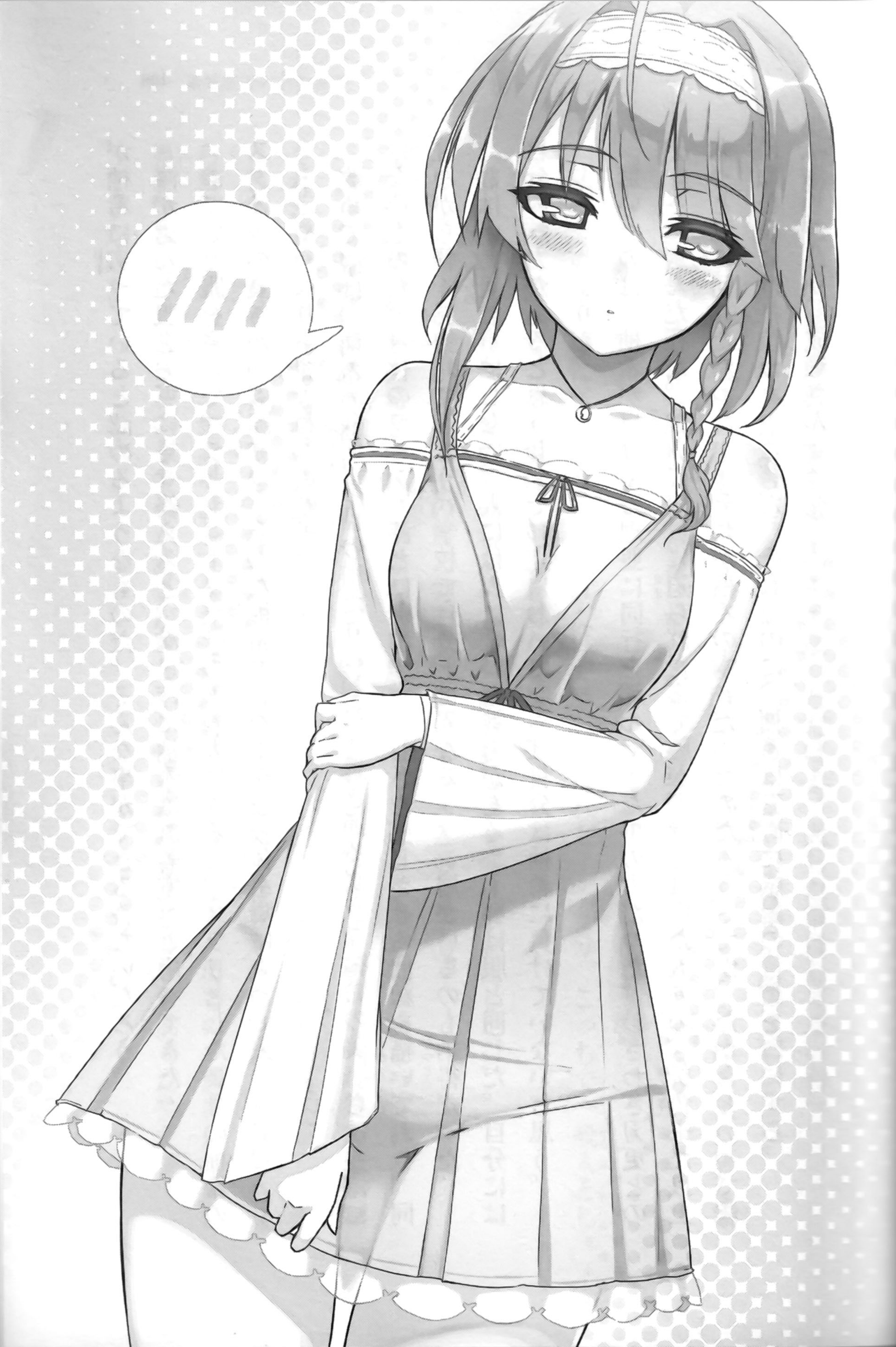
"Are you sure you should be so kind to your enemy, Mio-sama?"

"…Now look here, it was you, who suggested this."

"Well, yes, but… even so, why are you helping her so seriously? She will use these clothes to seduce Basara-san."

"Still, it's against my principle to be shoddy and recommend something ugly then."

A promise among girls. She didn't want to do a half-hearted job. And above all, if she were to make a coward move, it would mean she accepted being inferior to Yuki. There was no way she could do that.



After Yuki finishing showing the clothes Mio chose to Basara, she returned to the changing room satisfied.

When she took off her clothes and was only in her underwear, the great style of Yuki's tall figure was rather prominent. Mio stood next to that graceful body and looked at it through the mirror.

…She's really pretty after all.

Mio once again became aware of Yuki's charm. Yuki's clear complexion was something Mio didn't have. Her body line drew different feminine curves than Mio's and while they were of the same gender, Mio was a bit captivated.

She also comprehended why she had a fan club at school like herself.

That said, she wasn't envious. Each person had it's own charm--- same for clothes. Mio had her own charm and believed she didn't lose to Yuki in that regard.

…More importantly.

What she was surprised about was that Yuki had asked Maria and her to accompany her. Yuki was supposed to be on a special date with Basara.

The persistent clerk had stolen her thunder, but actually Yuki should have wanted to go around some more with Basara on this occasion.

Even so she should have been opposed to ask Mio. Yet, Yuki honestly spoke out words of gratitude.

"Thank you, Naruse-san."

"It's fine… I only helped you find some clothes with a shop clerk. It's nothing special."

When Mio answered brusquely, Yuki shook her head with "No". Dropping her gaze,

"That's not true. I never came to a place like this before… and only trained when I was in the village. So, I don't know what a real date is like."

"……I see."

"I'm just happy to be with Basara… But I think it's boring for him, since he's used to an ordinary life."

Being told that by Yuki in quiet voice, Mio once again realized that she was a Hero.

And--- that she herself had inherited the power and blood of the previous Devil Lord.

---However, the timing at which they found out about their own situation had decisively been different for Mio and Yuki.

Mio got to know about her own linage half a year ago--- On the day her foster parents, which she thought were her parents, were killed.

Until then, Mio had lived as a normal girl with a normal happiness.

However, Yuki on the other hand had known about her existence ever since she could remember and was trained for it.

Of course it would be insolent to call that misfortune. The Hero Tribe had the mission to fight to protect the world, but obviously they should have happiness in their life as well.

…But.

Even so, they surely experienced yearning for the natural happiness of average people.

When Mio inadvertently fell silent, Yuki said with a cold voice, as Mio's thoughts were showing on her face.

"It's not something for you to worry about. Thanks to you, I could buy clothes to seduce Basara."

"Seduce… Now you."

"I also learned about dates. Making use of today's experience, I'll go on a better date with Basara next time, with just the two of us."

Yuki said nonchalant. Mio certainly couldn't overlook this.

"Hey--- You plan to go on another date with Basara?"

"Of course. Now then, guide me to the next shop and choose some clothes for me."

This girl… for asking a favor, she was having a rather haughty attitude. However, "Fine--- Let's do this."

Accepting Yuki's challenge at once, Mio smiled fearless.

Once promised, she would go through with it until the end. And she wouldn't be half-hearted.

But Yuki would do better not to forget.

Buying new clothes--- prettying up, that wasn't something exclusive to Yuki.

Going around various shops then, Yuki borrowed the help of Mio and clerks.

Finally she decided what she would buy next.

When Mio and Maria started to choose clothes for themselves too, they tried on clothes in a competition and all three showed their new selves to Basara one after another.

All kind of new fashion terms and unthinkable arrangements. All of it had a novelty--- But Yuki surely didn't even understand half of it.

Even so, she had fun, since she could spent a holiday together with Basara. And regarding Mio and Maria, she hardly considered them a bother, since they faced her upfront instead of interrupting her date.

Of course she would have preferred to be all alone with Basara, but it was a fact that the two helped her on numerous occasions. Therefore--- Yuki believed it was fine like this.

"…Okay, I'll go buy this." "Yeah. We'll wait outside."

Nodding to Basara, who replied so, Yuki lined up at the register. As they went around a lot of shops, the time had already changed from afternoon to evening upon a look on the wristwatch.

It was hard to tell, since they had been in an illuminated building the whole time, but it would surely be dark when they got outside.

…Oh right.

Before going home with the train, she should go eat something with Basara. She wouldn't mind inviting Mio and Maria too, since they helped her with the shopping.

Showing a small smile, Yuki glanced behind her--- turning around to Basara and the others outside the shop.

"----"

The scene in her field of vision made her look inadvertently turn bitter. She couldn't hear their conversation due to the distance. But judging from their expression, she could clearly tell that Maria most likely teased Mio, who then got angry, and Basara watched these two with a wry smile.

Above all, Basara's side profile while looking at Mio and Maria was gentle.

Nonaka Yuki saw the happiness that she wanted at a place that she couldn't reach.

---Basara, no longer a Hero, lived with a new family in a new place and was fighting for the girls' sake. That was Basara's present and desired future.

And--- Yuki was merely a symbol of his past to Basara.

Yuki went through the tragedy at the <village> five years ago together with Basara and she embodied the very past that still kept hurting him, so she was nothing but a bother to the future with Mio, which Basara was envisioning.

"…………."

So Yuki averted her eyes and turned her back to them. Because she could no longer look at it. Then she kept waiting in the line at the register for her turn with her eyes cast down.

"Next one please~" "….."

It was her turn now and Yuki was about to move forward--- when her arm was suddenly grabbed from the side.

She didn't sense anything until her arm was touched. She looked at the other party in surprise.

"---?"

Yuki's breath was inadvertently taken away. It was a familiar face.

A girl--- with the same cold eyes as herself.

"Kurumi…"

When she dumbfounded called her name, the girl said with an indifferent voice.

"The <village> made an official decision. I came to tell you--- your new mission."

One breath.

"Enough with playing house… Big Sis."

"……Mh?"

Basara had been talking with Mio and Maria, but suddenly he felt something amiss and frowned.

The presence of Yuki, whom they were waiting for, had disappeared.

"Yuki…?"

He quickly shifted his gaze to the line at the register, but Yuki, who was supposed to be there, wasn't to be seen.

No matter how much he searched the shop. No matter how much he searched the surroundings.

Nonaka Yuki had unexpectedly disappeared from their sight, even though she was with them moments ago.

Part 4

In the end, they couldn't find Yuki after that.

They asked the shop clerk, but didn't get a favorable response and even when they looked around the other shops in the mall and searched for her in the area outside, she was nowhere to be found.

All calls to her cell phone just resulted in the out-of-range announcement. She must have turned her phone off. Because of that the GPS function couldn't find her either.

"…Just what happened? Did she go home ahead of us?"

"Can't be… Us two aside, Basara's here. So that's impossible."

While listening to the exchange of Maria and Mio next to him, Basara was thinking about something else. It was something he felt when he was all alone with Yuki--- A glance.

…But.

Shortly after Mio and Maria had appeared and then he hadn't really felt it anymore. The timing was too good, so he had thought for sure that it were Mio and Maria watching them.

Could it be--- there had been someone else watching them?

After returning to their local area with the train, they headed for Yuki's mansion just in case, but

"…No good. She isn't there."

Calling her cell phone one last time resulted as expected in out-of-range. They were finally out of ideas, so they had no choice but to return to the Toujou House.

"…………." "…………." "…………."

The sky was clouded and the road at night was illuminated by street lights while the three of them walked home in silence. Even though they had so much fun earlier. Even though they spent that time together. The silence made it seem like a dream.

…At a time like this,

If--- he had a Master and Servant Contract with Yuki as well. Then he could locate her right away. However,

…What am I thinking.

Basara immediately discarded the cheap idea. He wanted to ease his worry so bad that his thoughts took a strange direction.

But, if anything had happened to Yuki--- Thinking so, Basara's chest tightened inevitable.

---Five years ago, a tragedy befell the Hero's village. On that day, at that time, lots of his comrades lost their lives and Basara's own power went out of control, causing even more destruction.

Even so, some lives were saved and one of them was none other than Yuki's. If something happened to Yuki now, he would---

"…Basara? What's wrong, Basara!"

Strongly pulled on his arm from the side, Basara came back to his senses.

"Are you okay, Basara-san…?"

"…Yeah, I'm fine. Sorry… I was thinking about something."

When Basara repeated a "I'm fine" with a powerless smile, suddenly the ring tone resounded from his pocket.

It wasn't the tone for a call, but mail.

Even so, Basara pulled out his cell phone reflexively and first confirmed the sender.

Regretfully it wasn't from Yuki.

When Basara shook his head, Mio next to him mumbled a quiet "I see…". But looking at the field with the sender name, Basara stiffened his expression a bit.

There was no name. It was blank. But for someone that sent him a mail for the first time, it should display the mail address.

Why it didn't do that was because Basara himself set it up to be like that.

It was the person, whom he secretly formed an alliance with and thus saved the number differently from the others for an absolute secretive exchange.

It was the very first time that this person sent him a mail.

"……….."

The written content was just like Basara had imagined. So when he read through it wordless, he pressed the delete button to erase the mail right afterwards and the cell phone started to delete it--- In that very moment.

Suddenly the surroundings got darker. The moment he realized that--- an attack came from right above.

"---Get away, Maria!"

While giving an instant warning, Basara picked up Mio and jumped.

"H- Hey!"

Mio raised a surprised voice, but Basara had no time to care.

Because the attack hitting the ground gave off a fierce shock wave along with a roaring sound. Basara landed while still holding Mio.

"---You okay!?" "Yes, somehow!"

On Maria's reply from the corner of his vision, he made a sigh of relief for now.

---The reason he only warned Maria was that she was on his opposite side with Mio in-between them.

But Maria, a Hard Striker that specialized in close combat, should be good at sudden movements--- His judgement came from believing so. In response to Basara's instant judgement and choice,

"Hoo--- your reaction is quicker than I thought."

An audacious voice resounded from above, making somewhat fun of him.

When Mio looked up, a giant man was floating in midair.

An ominous black aura spread from his body.

There was no doubt. It was a devil from the current Devil Lord Faction. And a bit apart,

"…What is going on here?"

Maria slowly stood up and said. Glaring fiercely at the enemy devil,

"Your attack just now… If you had it aimed at just Basara-san and me, I could have overlooked it, but at worst, you could have dragged Mio-sama into it.

Is that what you, the current Devil Lord Faction wants?"

"Huuh? I ain't really wanting to drag her into it. It would be bad if I killed her carelessly and Wilbert's power gets lost. But a battlefield is always changing. Some things just happen--- accidents, ya know."

The floating giant devil let his body shake by laughing.

"Besides--- The top brass want Wilbert's power, but if this stupidly inherited power gets lost by an attack like this just now, it wouldn't be of any use anyway."

But, saying so, he looked at Basara.

"That retainer succubus aside, ya ain't half-bad either, Runt… Still, not so much that Lars would've troubles with ya."

He said so, then he scrunched his nose.

"Well, whatever--- I'm gonna kill everyone besides Wilbert's daughter anyway."

Basara listened to these words while still holding on to Mio's waist.

"……Is it your doing?"

On Basara's low and cold voice, the giant devil looked puzzled.

"Huh? Say what?"

"Is it your doing that Yuki disappeared?"

Basara asked again. Upon that, the devil finally seemed to recall.

"Ohh--- That Hero girl."

The moment he said so, Basara's appearance next to Mio vanished.

"Eh---?"

Mio raised a bewildered voice on the sudden happening. At that time--- Basara was already in front of the giant devil.

And in his right hand was Brynhildr, his beloved sword, already materialized.

He swung it.

The side-slash attack Basara swung went into the giant devil's torso like it was drawn there.

---In that moment, Basara felt a resistance.

But it was abnormal tough for a resistance of his attack.

CREEEEEAAAAAAAK!

"Kuh…!"

Along with a shrill metallic sound, Basara's right hand became numb. He was warded off. And moreover, not by a guard with a weapon or shield. The torso of the giant devil took in Brynhidlr as it was.

"Hey, you're really short-tempered--- Are ya getting enough calcium?"

While laughing a Heh, the devil

"I'll break your body all over… so that you fit into my pocket, Runt!"

Saying so and launching his right fist towards Basara. Instantly Basara kicked the devil's torso and retreated a paper-length away from the fist's range.

However the launched fist of the devil produce a shock wave as it was,

"? Guh, Gaaah----!?"

Receiving a full blow of the invisible attack, Basara was sent flying backwards. Crashing right into the border of the barrier--- the wall between normal space and this isolated space.

"Oh, what's wrong? Done already?"

There the devil approached. He wanted to give the finishing blow. However, before the newly launched fist could reach Basara, the devil was engulfed in flames along with a roaring sound.

"Don't pop out of nowhere and act like you're some big-shot!"

Mio released more flames in succession.

"Hah… This shabby flame ain't even tickling me!"

Despite that, the devil's charge wasn't stopped. He broke straight through the flames.

"---Then what about this?"

Using the flames as a cover, Maria had gone in front of him and her fist rammed into the devil's torso.

BAM! A heavy crashing sound. The attack from Maria, a Hard Striker relying on strength, certainly stopped the devil's charge.

"…That hurt."

"Eh--- Gah!?"

The back of his left hand blew Maria's small body away like shaking her off. Right before she crashed into the ground, Basara somehow made it in time to catch Maria's body, but

"What happened to your earlier vigor? Is barking all you can do?"

The giant devil swung down his fists one after another with over motions, sending shockwaves down from the air.

Basara and the girls split up and dodged them somehow, but they couldn't counter-attack.

…Damn, he's a perfect power type!

He looked like a simple brute, but a power type could fight perfectly with an excess of it.

Power was strength. A body capable of handling an enormous power obviously had a high defence from tenacity too and as a matter of fact, it easily blocked Basara's earlier attack.

He was most likely superior to even Maria, a fellow power type--- Moreover, he was a Shooting Fighter, even capable of attacking with shock waves.

The problem was not only that Basara's attack didn't work, but Maria's fist as well.

So even if they closed the distance, they had no way to effectively damage him.

So their last bet was the powerful high-class magic from Mio, a magic type, but--- needless to say, the more powerful the magic was, the more mental concentration it needed. Thus,

…When he keeps attacking with shock waves like this…

He looked at Mio, but she couldn't afford any time to chant a magic, as she had her hands full with dodging the downpour of shock waves.

Judging by his stature, he probably had superior stamina as well.

At some point Basara and the girls would be unable to take a breath and dodge the shock waves first--- It was stalemate like this.

…Then,

Basara crouched down and concentrated.

What he estimated was the best and shortest route to slay the enemy in the air and his own speed needed for that.

And then--- Basara was about to attack by kicking off the ground. At that time.

"Such a pain… I'll finish you off all together."

Saying so, the enemy, who had been dealing with Maria, launched an unforeseen attack.

---The type of shockwaves so far that cut in a straight line were produced by a punch with the fist.

That fist stopped now midway. Upon that, the air was hit--- As a result, the produced shock wave wasn't a straight line, but spread radially, coming towards Basara and the girls all at once.

"? Bastaaaaaaard----!"

Basara used the energy he had built up for his attack with high speed for a counterattack.

The attack released in front of Mio and Maria wasn't <Banishing Shift>, but it succeeded in cutting apart the shock wave. The radial shock wave passed by Basara's side to vertical behind him.

"Sweet. Now we're talking."

Even while his own attack was warded off, the giant devil was rather happy.

"Then--- try this!"

The moment he said so, the already thick right arm of the devil swelled up one--- no, two sizes larger.

…Not good!

Most likely the enemy tried to launch an enormous attack that wouldn't even compare to the previous ones.

---The old Basara would have surely gone out to the front immediately at such a time.

Without doubt he would close the distance with his utmost speed and prevent the enemy from attacking.

However, the current Basara hesitated.

He couldn't decide on the spot if he should charge into the attack or if he should devote himself to defense to protect Mio and Maria.

The enemy used the opening created by Basara's short hesitation to make his attack motion.

"---Huh?"

However, the giant devil stopped his movement, as he had suddenly realized something.

Just why?

Basara saw the answer to that at the torso of the devil. The floating devil---had something pierced through his gigantic body.

"A spear…?"

Mio, looking at it from a different angle, mumbled frowning, whereupon there was a rapid change in the body of the devil.

It started to freeze up snow-white with a noise.

The giant body of the devil, solidifying all over in no time, stopped floating and fell down to the ground.

CLINK. Along with a noise like glass breaking, the devil smashed up into very small pieces.

Part 5

All that was left was a single white long spear pierced into the ground.

Mio and the others couldn't react to the sudden happening. Amidst this motionless silence,

"-------"

A single young man appeared from somewhere. Looking at his side-profile as he was picking up the spear wordless,

"Takashi…"

Mio heard Basara's sudden dumbfounded mumbling in front of her.

Having his name called, the young man shifted his sharp eyes from the spear in his hand to Basara.

"…Who's that, Basara?"

"Hayase Takashi… My childhood friend, just like Yuki, from back then when I was in the <village>."

On Basara's answer to her question, Mio could guess the circumstances more or less.

…No wonder he was able to get into this space then.

Mio knew of the tragedy that Basara was involved with back then when he was still in the Hero village.

She also knew what happened from Basara's power going of out control.

It gave many people never healing mental wounds and was the reason Basara was chased out of the village.

There probably weren't many people like Yuki, who were friendly to Basara after the incident.

At least--- the look the young man gave Basara wasn't one of a long-awaited reunion with a childhood friend.

"Takashi, why are you… And that spear, don't tell me…"

When Basara asked still somewhat unbelieving, suddenly

"Yeah--- You're right, it's 'Byakko'." [1]

A chuckling voice came from behind. When Mio turned around, there was a slit-eyed young man.

"----!?"

As soon as seeing that young man, Basara changed his expression and moved with a jump.

He stood obstructing in front of the young man, covering Mio and Maria.

"H- Hey, Basara…?" "What is the matter all of a sudden?"

Mio and Maria were perplexed by the uncommon situation, whereas Basara didn't reply. Still wearing a stern expression, he was waiting for the reaction of the young man. Upon that,

"Geez. And here we finally reunited… Don't give me such a hateful look."

The slit-eyed young man shrugged his shoulders and made a wry smile. Towards him,

"Shiba-san… Why are you here?"

Basara asked with an obviously different attitude than towards the young man called Hayase Takashi.

…Basara?

Looking at Shiba, Basara's side-profile showed a great alertness and tension.

"Do you… even need to ask? The <village> orders."

"Don't screw around. The <village> would normally never let you go outside."

"---I wonder who's screwing around here."

said Takashi interrupting.

"Basara… Don't tell me, you're considering this situation normal?"

"What do you mean by that…"

"The girl with the inherited power of the previous Devil Lord is here. Can you call that normal?"

"…Are you saying it was decided that Yuki alone isn't enough to observe her?"

It was Shiba, who answered Basara's question.

"No, Yuki-chan's enough for the surveillance. It's the opposite. It was decided that surveillance wasn't enough."

Then Takashi spoke out the decisive words, taking up on Shiba's sentence.

"The <village> changed Naruse Mio from a S- rank surveillance target to a S- rank termination target. This is an official statement. That's why we're here--- To fulfil our duties as Heroes."

Facing Takashi, Mio was inadvertently taken aback.

Word-wise he had used the term termination, but Takashi basically was saying to kill Mio.

Mio personally wanted to avoid fighting with the Hero Tribe if possible.

One reason was that it was situationally tough to take on the devils of the current Devil Lord Faction while fighting with the Heroes.

…Moreover.

She was fighting together with Basara, a former Hero, and kind of came to an understanding with Yuki, a current Hero, through the incident the other day.

Precisely because of that it was possible that they went shopping together today.

But Mio realized that her thinking was too naïve.

For the Current Devil Lord Faction, she wasn't Naruse Mio, but the daughter of the previous Devil Lord Wilbert.

Same applied to the Hero Tribe. Mostly likely it was the same for Maria of the moderate faction.

"……."

Looking down, she wordless bit down on her lips, whereupon suddenly a hand was rested on Mio's shoulder.

It was from the only one here that saw Mio as herself.

Her big brother that tried to protect her as his family, as his little sister--- Toujou Basara.

"-----"

With calm, yet resolute eyes, Basara stared at Takashi.

It was a declaration of his resolve. He was still holding Brynhidlr in his right hand. Therefore,

"Well, I knew you would be like that, Basara… You're Jin-san's son after all."

Shiba behind him wearily made a wry smile.

"That said, we aren't here for fun either. Since you were chased out of the <village>, you aren't treated as a comrade anymore, but just an ordinary human--- if you interfere with us, you'll be an enemy."

"Yeah… I'm prepared for that, Shiba-san."

He would protect Mio, who couldn't be protected by the Heroes. He was here today because he had decided so.

"More importantly, let me ask one thing. The reason Yuki suddenly disappeared…"

"Mh? Oh, if you're looking for Yuki-chan…"

On these words, a girl quietly appeared from behind Shiba.

"Yuki, you…"

On Basara's outcall, Yuki looked at him for just a moment, but cast down her eyes sadly right away.

Her emotions aside, she stood with them--- That spoke volumes for Yuki's standpoint.

"The <village> wants Yuki to fight too…?"

"---What do you mean?"

Takashi narrowed his eyes and asked, whereas Basara replied somewhat irritated.

"Just like I said it. Yuki has always been docile and didn't like to fight. The <village> appointed her to observe Mio, but forcing her to fight, that's---"

just wrong… Basara tried to say that, but couldn't.

Because a lightning ball drew near him from the side, interrupting his words.

"Watch out!"

Suddenly Mio got in front and created a magical barrier, but

"---? Kyaaaaa!"

The lightning ball, crashing into the barrier, sparked and sent Mio flying.

"Mio-sama!"

Maria hastily rushed over, whereas Mio got up while scowling with "I'm fine", whereupon a girl appeared from the shadows of an alley, where the lighting ball had come from.

"Kurumi, even you…"

"Don't call my name so casually, you traitor!"

Kurumi shouted with a tone that gives the impression of hatred.

"Protecting the daughter of the previous Devil Lord? I'm impressed you can mess around like that… You don't even know what feelings my sister lived the past five years!"

"------"

Toujou Basara stood stock still on Kurumi's angry shout. Because she was right.

When they reunited at Hijirigasaka Academy, Basara was surprised at Yuki's change.

The five years, in which he hadn't seen her, had changed Yuki so much.

But Basara, having left the village and no longer a Hero, didn't have the right to worry about Yuki.

And since he chose to protect Mio, who had inherited the blood of the previous Devil Lord, he was nothing but an traitor to Yuki and his former comrades. But,

"Is that all you have to say?"

Maria slowly stood up, then suddenly jumped by kicking off the ground. With the start dash from the powerful legs of a power type, she closed the distance to Kurumi in no time and tried to strike at her like that.

"---Don't get cocky, you measly succubus."

With a speed faster than Maria's, Takashi swung the spirit lance "Byakko" from the side.

That attack was stopped by Basara, who had gotten in-between Takashi and Maria, with Brynhidlr.

But something forcefully stopped the four, who had entered a full-blown fight with Basara vs. Takashi and Maria vs. Kurumi.

It was a roaring sound that shook the air. At the same time, the barrier that separated the space was easily destroyed.

"Wha…!?"

Suddenly being returned to the normal space, Basara and the others halted their battle.

"Okay--- That's enough. Don't get all fired up and start a battle here."

Shiba declared with a peaceful smile. With a somewhat threatening tone,

"The devil, who erected the barrier, is already dead. Are you guys insane for starting a fight within a space that so easily broke from my light attack? What if it causes casualties?"

Basara gulped on these words. It was no laughing matter. Sure, the devil had died, but the barrier had been still up.

The very barrier that easily took all these shock waves from the giant devil. Precisely because they knew that, they had started a fight.

"That's not good, Takashi, Kurumi-chan… Sure you guys are the actors this time, but I believe that I told you not to get too emotional. I'm just an overseer and the <village> forbid me any fighting with Basara and co. So spare me the trouble, okay?"

"……" "----Fine!"

Takashi and Kurumi jumped, albeit sullen, and landed next to Shiba and Yuki.

Seeing that, Basara and Maria relaxed for now, albeit still wary. A distance between both parties was naturally formed.

"That's the deal, Basara, so we'll excuse ourselves for now. If we carelessly wrecked the city, the elders would pressure us again. We'll settle this in one week. We'll prepare a barrier space that can withhold our fighting, so let's do it there--- What do you say?"

"…Not like I can say no."

"Yeah, guess so."

Shiba said nonchalant, whereas Basara asked.

"About that barrier, where are you going to put it up?" "I want a place suitable for barriers, but sadly we don't know this city very well yet. I'll contact you when we have decided on a place."

"If you're an overseer, Shiba-san, then we're going to fight Takashi and Kurumi?"

"And Yuki-chan. You're three too, so it matches perfectly."

"….."

Don't make Yuki fight--- Basara could no longer speak out that wish.

He looked at Yuki once more, but Yuki never met his eyes again.

"---Well, in one week then."

Saying so, Shiba and the others turned their backs to them and left.

Part 6

"Hee--- I knew they would come one day, but it's rather early for these obstinate elders."

After the chance meeting with Takashi and the others, Basara returned home and contacted Jin in his own room.

---Jin, the head of the Toujou Household, left the house and was infiltrating the demon realm.

He had said that he wanted to get in touch with someone, but Basara hadn't heard anything in detail. That Jin wouldn't tell him about it probably meant that it still wasn't the time for him to hear it.

Jin's cell phone had a special magic chip in it that allowed him to have a call like this, albeit depending on some conditions like time or place in the demon realm. And,

"But to think that the elders let Kyouichi out of the <village>…"

Basara had told him the circumstances from start to end, whereas Jin said with an unusual serious tone.

"But Shiba-san said he's only an overseer this time and won't fight."

"Well, they had to give him some kind of shackle outside the village, but… be careful."

"Yeah, I know…"

The aftermath of the tragedy five years ago. The reason it was suggested to throw Basara into prison right after his <Banishing Shift> went out of control was because there had been a "Precedent Case".

Basara had been called a "Genius" by people, but the term to evaluate Shiba Kyouichi was "Over talented".

His all too moody character in view of that superiority made him cause "problems" and as a result, he was confined to prison for various years.

To be honest--- They were quite lucky under the circumstances without him joining the fight this time.

Thus, Basara shifted his attention to the pressing matter first.

"…Yuki fought together with us before, though for certain reasons, so I thought she wouldn't be all that hostile towards Mio. Even today we all went shopping together."

Of course Basara didn't think the <village> would let go of Mio so easily.

However. Somewhere in his heart, he was embracing a faint hope.

Even though she ended up inheriting the power of the previous Devil Lord, Mio never wanted any of this.

To begin with, Mio had been raised as a normal human girl until half a year ago without knowing about her devil bloodline.

So it couldn't be helped that they kept being wary of her as a surveillance target, but they wouldn't try to kill Mio by setting her as a termination target--- That was what he had wished for.

"What were you expecting? They have the sole mission to protect the peace in the human world."

"Yeah… I know. But I also have things I want to protect."

Basara tightly clenched his right fist.

"Yeah, right. I'm not going to question the nobility of their mission, but if we can't make a compromise no matter what, then we can only take them on."

"…Are you fine with that, Dad?"

It was different from taking on the current Devil Lord faction, which was after Mio's inherited power.

Even if they were chased out, they had once been comrades.

Another trouble was that the Hero Tribe, working on world peace, only considered Wilbert's inherited power as a threat.

That meant that they would mercilessly come to kill Mio, unlike the devils, who tried to get a hold of it and use it.

Even if they should win against Takashi and the others this time, it was quite unlikely that the <village> would revoke a statement that was passed once.

On the contrary, they would surely deem her more dangerous and send even stronger enforcers.

---Moreover, the Hero Tribe didn't just exist in Japan.

The appearance of devils and demonic beasts wasn't limited to just Japan.

It was necessary to protect the world, not just Japan. So the Hero Tribe had divided the world into many areas and each protected it's assigned area, Japan being one of that.

So when they made an enemy of the Japan <village>, the Hero Tribes all over the world would inevitably become their enemy. But,

"I don't really care. That's just what it means to protect Mio."

Jin readily said on the other side of the phone.

"We're talking here about the guys, who wanted to chase you out of the village as a surveillance target, were eager to kill you if anything happens and even wanted to make me take on the role of observing you. Like I would care about some holy duty now."

"That's… true, but"

He knew that they had to take a clear stance to protect Mio.

…But.

At any rate, there was a reluctance inside Basara about making his former comrades his enemy.

Lose and it was all over. But winning would just increase the hardships.

He didn't know if he could find anything from a fight under these circumstances.

Moreover, of all things his first opponents were Takashi, Kurumi--- and even Yuki. That was just too ironic. However,

"Hey--- Don't tell me you're worrying about what happens after you win, even though you haven't even fought yet? Where does that composure come from?"

"That wasn't my…"

Basara hastily denied.

"I won't tell you to forget about the future, but don't be too greedy. Even if you wreck your brain, some things just happen. So focus on what's right in front of you first. At the least, you'll lose something if you lose and you'll protect something if you win. That's where you have to draw the line."

"….."

Right. What was he worrying about? The school nurse Hasegawa told him as well, didn't she?

He should draw a line he would never back off from and protect it.

Remember. What was it that he--- Toujou Basara truly wanted to protect?

"Right… Yeah, I'll do it."

Basara said so like shaking off the hesitation within him, whereas Jin laughed with "Good".

"I'll take responsibility. It doesn't matter that the opponent has 'Byakko'--- Go beat him up."

Beyond the Trust between Master and Servant

Part 1

One week until the battle. However, they would never be able to win against Takashi and the others in their current conditions.

Thus Basara and the girls worked out a plan. They would undoubtedly need fierce training to raise their battle potential, but since the time was limited, they needed to act with utmost efficacy.

---For that, they first had to know more about their opponent.

Yuki was the technique type, had perfect control over her spirit sword "Sakuya" and her ability to fight at mid-to-close range made her a Multi-Saber.

Mio and Maria surely knew that, but unlike Yuki, Takashi and Kurumi were unknown factors to them. First they needed to know about them to fight against them.

Mio had cast a spell to keep humans away from the riverbed, which they used for their training.

"---First about Takashi, he's a speed type just like me."

Basara started to talk about his former comrade to Mio and Maria.

"His battle style is a Quick Lancer. Basically, he attacks directly while hampering you with his speed. However, that's only information from when I was still at the <village>--- Meaning, five years ago."

"You mean, it's possible his style changed now?"

Mio started learning about supernatural powers only for half a year yet, so she must have needed an explanation.

She asked frowning, whereas Basara shook his head with "No".

"That's not gonna happen. I think Maria knows already, but one's type is greatly influenced by one's inborn nature. Of course you can train yourself in other styles, but it's very unlikely you'll ever exceed the level of your original style."

And,

"In the past I might have been better, but judging from our little exchange the other day, I think they're better now… At least, Takashi's definitely on top in terms of power."

"No way…"

"Rest assured, Mio-sama. He is still a speed type. Even if he has the brute force, he cannot match me, a pure power type."

Mio became worried, whereas Maria said while puffing up her chest proudly.

"Right. And Mio's far superior in terms of magical power. It's just a matter of one's forte. You don't need to worry about it too much. You just have to come up with a strategy from your own style. You're a magic type, Mio--- and a High Wizard no less. Just focus on attacking from a distance."

"But… he defeated the devil we three had troubles against so easily."

So that was the reason Mio became so timid on a rare occasion.

Certainly, Takashi defeated the giant devil, who had the three of them cornered. However,

"That was yet another battle style. A perfect surprise attack--- The exact moment, right before he released a big move, he was neglecting his defense, thus giving an opening. In a face-to-face battle, not even Takashi would have won so easily."

Of course you couldn't call Takashi weak just because of that.

"Anyway, the problem is---" "---that spear, is it not?"

Maria continued his sentence, whereas Basara nodded a "Yeah".

"That long spear he was using… that's 'Byakko', a unique spirit lance."

"By 'Byakko', you mean the white tiger that's also shown on the Takamatsuka Tomb in our history books?"

"Yeah. Originally it's one of the 'Four Symbols' from China, the mythological guardian beast of the west. That long spear has the power of 'Byakko' residing in it."

"I knew of the Hero Tribe using mythological beasts. However, when it comes down to one of the Four Symbols, I would believe it's power is bound to China, where the legend is from…"

"Of course. To begin with, it's not the original 'Byakko' that resides in the spear. But in the past, a 'Byakko' existed in Japan too, different from the one on the Takamatsuka Tomb."

On Basara's words, Mio suddenly realized.

"---The Four God Suitability of Heian-kyou*?" [2]Basara nodded.

"Right. At that time, the esoteric cosmology of Onmyoudou was prospering and a part of the Onmyouji, who were left in charge with the protection of the city, deified the Four Gods, so intermediary sacred treasures were created on that occasion. That spear is one of them."

It was a sacred treasure created by pouring in the power of various renowned Onmyouji and moreover strengthened by the faith of numerous people. It was needless to say how tremendous it's power was.

"That said, an overly powerful weapon is hard to handle. There are conditions and limits on how 'Byakko's' power can be manifested in the spirit lance. As long as we're careful about that, we should be able to fight against it somehow."

"The mythological guardian beast of the west… I guess, it would be fatal to let him attack in the western direction?" Basara shook his head to Maria's uttered question.

"Nah, it's the opposite. Since 'Byakko' is the guardian beast for it, it cannot attack in the western direction. But on the other side, with it's back to the west and launching an attack into the eastern direction, it utilizes an enormous power."

That said, the West originating in China was different from the West of the cardinal directions. [3]

However, the "Byakko" in question was the spirit lance that was created as a sacred treasure from the belief in Japan's Heian period. Therefore it should be safe to assume that the normal cardinal directions applied to it. And, "According to Five Elements of China, the 'Byakko' is associated with metal, but in terms of the four classical elements, it's assigned the air element--- For a speed type like Takashi, it's the most befitting attribute."

"Air…? Then what froze that devil?"

"That's because Orion and Taurus, which are part of the seven mansion of the original 'Byakko', are winter constellations here in Japan. It must have a limited ice attribute from that. But it's a sub-attribute at best. Otherwise he wouldn't have shown it to us so easily."

"Basara-san, have you seen the main power of that spirit lance before?"

"Definitely not myself, but I heard that it releases a 'powerful gust that mows down everything'."

"Even so," said Basara.

"The long spear has a wide reach, but Mio's magic is even wider and Maria's at an advantage in a close range fight. Just keep your back to the West while fighting Takashi. But he should be anticipating that and he moves even faster than us. Even if he manages to get his back to the West, avoid standing in a directional line to the East by all cost then."

One breath,

"Distance and directions--- If we keep these two points in mind, we'll definitely beat him."

Part 2

"Mhm, I won't find a suitable place so easily in the city after all. How's it on your end, Takashi?"

"…Same for me. It might be better to give up the idea of using a common barrier."

Takashi indifferently responded to Shiba's voice, which he could hear from the wireless earphone.

---Already two days had passed since the night of the reunion with Basara.

It was now early afternoon.

Takashi and the others had split up to looked around the city.

They were searching for a suitable place for the battle with Basara and the girls. If they simply took human casualties into consideration, the public park with the wide ground and forest would be optimal.

But the nature of forests or mountains often happened to be spiritual points, which protected and cleanse the land. There was a proper reason to why the main river of the north intersected with the forest and hill of the park.

He had heard from Yuki that during the fight in that forest the other day, Naruse Mio let her own power go out of control and wrecked the place beyond recognition. And as expected, the flow in the earth there was still in disorder, making the place unsuitable for the upcoming battle.

If they carelessly harmed the place, the flow would completely break down and might cause the destruction of the whole area by natural disasters in the future.

Besides, he had "Byakko" with him now.

The places, where he could utilize it's enormous strength, were inevitably limited from the beginning. In the worst case, he would have to consider holding back with the power, but

…No, it has to be a place, where "Byakko's" full power can be released.

The enemy wasn't just Naruse Mio and her retainer Succubus. They would be facing Basara as well.

---Hayase Takashi hadn't forgotten what an overwhelming existence Basara had been in the village.

A genius.

The talent he was born with was cruelly out of league with Takashi's and even while they were both speed types, Takashi never managed to catch up to Basara, no matter how fast he ran.

But that was five years ago.

Takashi was different from his past-self now. And not just him. Yuki and Kurumi too.

Likewise--- Basara was different from his previous self too. Quite crucially at that.

"Basara and the girls must be desperately coming up with a plan right now…"

"……Let them try. It won't change anything anyway."

From that gruesome incident until today, Takashi and the other had undergone fierce training.

Not forgetting the tragedy of that day and embracing the despair in their hearts.

Precisely because of that they could endure the harsh training and become stronger.

---However, each of them had a different reason for becoming stronger.

Yuki changed her feelings for Basara, who was chased out of the village, into her strength.

Kurumi gained her current strength because she wished to help her older sister.

And Takashi--- He didn't want such a tragedy to occur ever again.

Just wishing for that, he became strong.

Compared to Basara, he spent his time far more significantly.

It wasn't like they were on bad terms.

Just like Yuki and Kurumi, Takashi was a childhood friend of Basara.

He was with Basara just as long as Yuki and Kurumi were.

But,

…What was he doing after leaving the village?

Of all things, Basara was together with the previous Devil Lord's daughter, who would only bring disaster to the world.

How could he do such a thing when he witnessed such a tragedy.

Forgetting his mission as a Hero, he might temporarily be driven by an emotional sense of justice, but it seemed that the tragedy of that day had completely become a thing of the past for Basara.

"If so, I'll remind him…"

About his sin.

About the irredeemable souls of their comrades, who he erased.

Because everyone who survived that incident was a victim, but also an offender.

Yuki would stand up for Basara due to her feelings for him, but Kurumi, who looked up to Yuki as her little sister, couldn't forgive Basara, which Takashi could relate to.

His own feelings were the same.

Hayase Takashi spit out.

"Don't forget, Toujou Basara--- Your past won't be undone."

Regardless of how much time passed.

Because the memory of that day engraved in their hearts would never fade.

Part 3

"------"

Naruse Mio gulped on the chilly sensation on her throat.

In front of her, Basara pointed the tip of his magical sword Brynhildr at her.

He had stopped the sword at a paper-length away because they were practicing. But if this had been a real fight--- If her opponent had been Hayase Takashi, Shiba Kyouichi or Nonaka Kurumi, then Mio would have been dead for sure.

"---Good, let's take a small break."

Basara relaxed his expression and withdrew his sword.

"Ah…"

Mio slumped down with her bottom on the ground after being released from the pressure that had sealed her movements.

At the same time, all the tension left her body and in exchange a sudden exhaustion befell her. However,

"I… I can still go on…"

Mio tried to stand up despite that, whereupon a soft, white towel was put around her shoulders.

"I know. But we'll continue when you've rested a bit and regained some stamina. If you overdo it, you lose focus, which is dangerous."

"……"

With his hand gently on her head, Mio nodded.

---Basara had told them about Hayase Takashi, who was holding the spirit lance 'Byakko', Nonaka Yuki, Nonaka Kurumi and even about Shiba Kyouichi's battle style just in case, even though he had said that he wouldn't participate in the fight this time.

Afterwards they were training real battles every day.

This city wasn't short on places, where they could practice after setting up a barrier or casting a spell to keep humans away, like the famous park, rivers or various golf courses.

After school, they were immediately training in the forest on the golf grounds next to the park. Taking Basara up on his words, Mio took a deep breath to control her breathing, whereupon

"Here, Mio-sama. A sports drink with minerals. Please re-hydrate yourself with it."

"Mm… Thanks."

Taking the pet bottle of the drink with the catchphrase of having the same composition as sweat from Maria, Mio opened the cap and wet her throat. The pleasant coldness streamed into her whole body through her throat.

"---Ah, Basara-san. Can I ask you to spar with me next?"

"Mh? Yeah, sure."

It had already been two hours since they started the training today. Basara wasn't just taking on Mio, but also Maria all by himself, yet he didn't show the slightest shred of exhaustion.

"Then I will begin" "Yeah--- Come."

After a short exchange, the two of them erased their smiles--- and attacked upfront in the next moment.

A close range fight with Basara swinging his Brynhildr and Maria fighting barehanded with her superhuman strength, spread in front of Mio's eyes.

Basara's beloved sword Brynhildr was single-edged with a thick and huge build. Thus he could launch heavy blows even with the back of the sword, but Maria, being a succubus and power type on top, had high physical strength and easily absorbed the blows.

This was training of course. Basara wasn't attacking with his full might, but if Mio were to carelessly take one of these hits, she wouldn't just break some bones, she would be smashed. They exchanged blows, Basara with slashes and Maria with kicks and punches, one after another while each changing back and forth between offence and defense.

"…….."

While watching their fight, Mio felt frustration inside her heart.

…I understand it in my head, but.

In the past few days, Mio had fully realized how lacking her own strength was.

It had been half a year since she came to know about the existences and powers that went beyond the laws of this world. As she luckily had a talent for magic, she could cast powerful spells now.

According to Maria, that was an astonishing learning speed. However, compared to Basara and Maria, Mio overwhelmingly lacked actual battle experiences, even though she had trained with Maria so far.

Therefore she was now conducting training in the form of real battles against Basara or Maria, which brought about good results in the beginning, but since she wasn't used to the tension and pressure of a long battle, her stamina and concentration would run out before the other two, getting her cornered gradually.

She was already like that during training. A real fight was even more exhausting. Moreover, Hayase Takashi, the hero she would be facing soon, had a strength on par or even greater than Basara.

…At this rate

She would only drag down the others. That was what she felt.

The decisive battle was in four days--- Only unrest and impatience swelled up inside Mio.

Part 4

Going to school in the morning, doing nothing but training after school until the sun sets, and then back to bed.

Repeating these three activities, the last few days went by in a flash.

And in the night two days away from the decisive battle--- Basara got a call from Takashi. The stage for the battle was set.

Not wasting a single second on chit-chat, Takashi only reported the place and time, then hung up.

"….."

Basara had taken the call in the living room and wordlessly stared down on his cell phone.

Upon that, the door behind him opened.

"…Has it been decided?"

Maria came in with a calm voice.

She must have just finished washing off the sweat from today's training in the bath.

Basara headed to the sofa with his back still to her. "Yeah. It'll be at night to avoid people."

"I see… Well, that certainly is better."

Maria's voice moved into the kitchen, then the sound of the refrigerator opening resounded. She was surely taking out something to drink.

While Basara sat down on the sofa, he said to her.

"Both side will cooperate in setting up the barrier to avoid gaining an advantage in it. I think Mio can also use a spatial barrier spell besides the one to keep humans away, right?"

"Yes. She never set one up in cooperation with someone, but I believe it will be all right."

The battlefield was taken care of then.

Now they only needed to make the last preparations for the fight.

"Basara-san, would you like to have some milk too?"

"Mh? Yeah, why not."

Okay~, Maria replied like that, but didn't come over to him. He could hear the low electric noise from the kitchen. It seemed like she was using the microwave. And then,

"I made you a hot milk, Basara-san. If you like, please put in some maple syrup. It will relieve your tension and let you sleep more soundly."

"Thanks… wait, why're you dressed like that!?"

Holding a plastic tablet with a mug filled with hot milk and a big bottle of maple syrup on it, Maria was practically naked, except for a single bath towel.

"Why do you ask?… This is a rather normal attire for coming out of the bath. It would be far more surprising if I were to wear a fancy dress instead."

"Who told you to wear a dress! There's only one thing you wear after getting out of the bath."

"Erotic underwear, you mean."

"I mean pajamas!"

Maria said "Oh dear" to his retort and sat down next to him on the sofa.

Her small body steamed a bit from the remaining heat of the bath and gave off the faint fragrance of shampoo and body soap.

"You see, Basara-san, I just wanted to ask you for your opinion."

"M- My opinion…?"

Basara became excited from the unbelievable sex-appeal considering her young appearance.

"Yes--- On a very important matter."

Naruse Maria said so and brought her body closer to him.

---A few minutes after Maria, Mio, who had been in the bath with her, finally came out of the bath.

She stayed in a bit long, but she did so that her fatigue was washed away for tomorrow's training.

Besides, it was still relatively short today. Usually she would stay in another ten minutes.

The bathing powder she used today probably took it's effect on her.

Either way, they had Basara take a bath first, so she could take it easy and warm up her body completely.

Mio wiped the water drops on her faintly flushed body with a towel.

The microfiber towel properly even sucked up the water from Mio's wet hair.

Putting her legs, one after another, through the new shorts, she pulled it up to her bottom.

"Mm…"

After pulling out the finger, which she used to fix the wedged part, from the side, the highly elastic fabric made a small flicking sound on her bottom.

Next she put on a shirt in place of a pajama and buttoned it up.

She started from below instead from the top, since she left the chest open to prevent constriction in her sleep.

That exposed pretty much her breasts, let alone her cleavage, but Mio wasn't afraid of showing it to those inside the house.

For one thing, Maria was a girl like herself.

…And besides,

Basara had already seen her in more embarrassing appearances or situations.

---It wasn't like she was trying to provoke. She certainly was embarrassed.

However, if she were to put on extra clothes like a barrier, even though she was seen so messed up during the Master and Servant Contract or the shared bath-time, it would appear like she was strangely conscious of Basara.

Therefore Mio dared to behave normally even after that and sometimes wore an exposing attire. Occasional she felt Basara's glance on her breasts or bottom, whereupon she was embarrassed, but happy as well.

Because at least during these times, Mio had the initiative--- even though the Master and Servant Contract ended up in an unexpected form and gave her a weird weakness.

After drying her wet hair with the dryer, Mio left the bathroom and headed for the living room.

"Basara-san--- Could you subjugate Mio-sama some more?"

Suddenly she could overhear Maria's problematic statement through the gap of the living room's door.

Maria saw Basara making a doubtful face in front of her to her mentioned suggestion.

"…What do you mean? If you're playing around again…"

"I am not playing around. This is for Mio-sama and your sake" said Maria.

"We have only two days left until the fight with your former comrades. The past few days, we continued our training with the countermeasures in mind, but we cannot level up so easily after all. I am afraid you are the only one, who currently has a chance of fighting upfront on par with them, Basara-san. Unfortunately, Mio-sama and myself are currently still one… no, two steps behind."

"That's…"

Basara was at a loss for words, meaning Maria's analysis was correct.

Most likely Basara knew their difference in strength even better than Maria.

"Even you, our last hope, have a blank of five years, Basara-san. Moreover, you said that the person with the spirit lance has a strength even greater than yours--- As things stand now, we cannot win against them."

Basara stayed quiet on her assertion.

"However, I have a breakthrough solution. As you are aware, the contractors of the Master and Servant Contract gain a stronger power with deeper trust. If both of you obtain that, then I see a chance."

"That's why you want me to subjugate Mio…"

"Yes. Because even though I told you to deepen your trust, it only needs something adequate with the contract--- with the Master and Servant relationship. I am afraid that is our only chance for victory at this point. And I do not think we should pass on this chance."

"…I agree. It's a fact that it would be effective to make use of the contract. But the trust you speak of surely won't be deepened or strengthened so quickly."

"No, the intensity of feelings stands in no proportion with time. The feeling born in a single day can surpass the one gained from a year, likewise a single second can out rival a whole life. If you simply make up your mind, the chance of Mio-sama being helpful will go up quite a bit."

But Basara remained silent with a stiff expression on Maria's words.

"…Basara-san?"

Before long, Basara slowly answered her question.

"I get your point… but if possible, I don't want to do it."

Maria narrowed her eyes on these words. Did he think that they had the flexibility to be fussy at this point in time?

"Why? Are you holding back because we are family? Or does your sense of duty or hypocrisy keep you from doing something like that to your little sister?"

Maria asked with a precarious voice.

"Nah… That's not it."

"It's the opposite," said Basara. "I'll tell you on this occasion, Mio and you are precious family members to me. I consider you my real sisters. But don't trust me just because of that. I'm not a saint. I'm just your average teenager. Do you know how much effort it takes me to keep my reasoning in check while I live together with two girls not related by blood to me? If not for that Master and Servant Contract magic, I might have done something to you long ago."

"? What do you mean by that…?"

The Master and Servant Contract between Basara and Mio had Maria's succubus characteristic added to it. That made it easier to conduct a mistake, but it didn't warrant his uncompliableness.

"You don't know? For the sake of relieving the curse, for the sake of becoming stronger… This indulgence of "Because it's for Mio's sake" and embarrassing her is just cowardly. It's one thing if it's done for pure intentions, but I just can't do it like this."

"Eh… Is that so? But I get the feeling that you were rather calm midway during the time when you made Mio-sama submissive for the first time to form the contact?"

"It would just make Mio more embarrassed if I were to show shame. Besides, I thought I needed to appear calm so that Mio would submit faster."

"I, I see…"

On Basara's explanation, Maria received a light shock. Not towards the fact that Basara had been embarrassed. But because Basara was thinking about how to subjugate Mio better--- even in light of Mio's flustered appearance due to the aphrodisiac effect in addition to her already incredible looks and proportions.

…Wait, could it be.

During the cake scene in the bath, she had half-jokingly teased him as a brute, but he maybe actually had this kind of temper?

Maria felt a light shudder.

"Anyway, it's wrong to do something by saying it's for Mio's sake, even though I have ulterior motives. Of course I'll put her at ease when the curse activates, but… I'll do it then by saying 'I want to do it', since that's more honest."

"So you are taking the villain's role upon yourself…?"

"Nah. It's not something so noble."

"It's just," said Basara.

"Saying that I do these kind of things only for Mio's sake without any guilty feelings would be a lie for sure. If I cowardly sugar-coated it like that, it wouldn't just damage the trust in our Master and Servant relationship, but also our trust as a family. But I don't want that. Because even though it was a turn of events, I'm still her Master--- and her brother before that."

Basara said to her with a serious expression, whereupon Maria inadvertently widened her eyes.

Maria, a succubus, knew very well how weak men were to this kind of desire. And how they may have dirty and wicked thoughts towards the female gender somewhere deep inside. Even more so for a cute girl like Mio.

…But.

The boy named Toujou Basara in front of her properly admitted to having these desires without covering it up. Looking at him, Maria suddenly felt a shiver running down her spine.

"….I understand. I have another idea, so let us go with that."

"You still have more, huh… wait, hey!?"

Suddenly Basara raised a flustered voice. Because Maria had sat into his lap and loosened the knot of the bath towel that wrapped around her body. Maria rolled up the front of shirt that the surprised Basara was wearing.

"Please do not move…"

Saying so, she started to rub her bare skin against Basara. Unlike the previous time where she had slipped into Basara's T-Shirt, Maria was now showing Basara her naked body and lewd movements.

That gave Basara even a visual sensation of Maria's body heat and softness.

"W- Wait, Maria… What's up so suddenly?"

"If you feel sorry for Mio-sama and cannot do it, I will have you help me instead with the power-up."

As the succubus she was, she could increase her power by absorbing desire and arousal.

From a young boy with a pure heart like Basara, the effect was tremendous.

Maria laughed a "Fufu" with glazed eyes.

"Forgive me… But you are at fault, Basara-san, because you say such things with such an expression."

She could tell how surprisingly aroused she was herself. Her succubus instinct shot up inside her and couldn't be suppressed.

Maria let her tongue crawl over Basara's chest, clung to him and increased their direct contact by winding her arms around his sturdy back.

"Ahh… You are so delicious, Basara-san."

It was like a drug to her. Wanting to suck up everything from the boy in front of her, Maria let her hand slide down from his navel. When she let her small hand glide into his pants like this,

"H- Hey…!"

Basara's body suddenly shivered. This sensible reaction only turned Maria on even more. However--- Basara's eyes, who she had thought were only focusing on her, weren't looking at her, but behind her.

"……"

Maria turned around puzzled and froze in place.

In the opened door of the living room--- There stood Mio.

In that moment Toujou Basara was prepared for a bloodbath.

Because it was the same situation like when he was caught in the act of Maria making him play an erotic game.

No, this time it was even worse. After all, Basara was in a close embrace with the naked Maria. Mio would flare up at them---

So he thought.

"No, this---"

He hastily tried to explain, but couldn't find the right words on the spot.

---This situation was brought about by Maria without Basara's consent.

However, he couldn't unconditionally blame only Maria for it.

They certainly couldn't win as things stood at the moment.

So Maria, the succubus and Mio's retainer, had requested of him to deepened their relationship of the Master and Servant Contract by subjugating Mio through pleasure, all for the sake of victory, for the sake of protecting Mio.

Considering her upbringing in rank and race, it was an absolutely natural suggestion.

He knew what he had to say. Even so, Basara couldn't find the right words for it, whereupon

"Oh my, Mio-sama--- What are you standing there for?"

Of all things, Maria tightly squeezed Basara to show off to Mio.

"------"

Basara saw that Mio's face turned red upon seeing that. Maria totally added oil to the fire.

"M- Maria…?" "(Ssh, it is alright… Please watch.)"

He raised a bewildered voice, but Maria whispered back.

…No, even so…

While he did like he was told to, Mio came over briskly.

Then she stood in front of him. But,

"…."

That was all. He had thought for sure that she would hit Maria and launch a lightning attack at him. Yet Mio just stood still in front of them with her face still red.

…Mio?

In response to his doubtful glance, Mio bit into her lips and averted her eyes. Towards her,

"Mio-sama… Excuse me, but Basara-san and myself have important preparations to make for the fight in two days. When you are standing there like that--- it is a bother, to be frank."

Maria showed a provoking smile. Her succubus instincts had totally gotten the better of her.

"…."

The red Mio glared at her. Her expression looked somewhat mortified.

"Why are you making such a face? Well, if you insist on watching, then be my guest. However, please do not interfere with us."

Along with a smile, Maria put her hand into Basara's T-Shirt from below again. At that time.

"…Please, stop it."

Mio said so with a fragile voice.

Mio saw Maria stopping her hand on the plead she had uttered.

Then Maria looked up to her. Her childish, yet bewitching eyes were telling her:

What is the matter--- Please go on. Therefore Mio said with a trembling voice.

"…I'll do it… No, let me do it."

Because,

"The one that needs to get stronger the most isn't you, Maria… It's me. So please, Basara--- Subjugate me."

"No, but…"

Basara raised a confused voice, whereas Mio shook her head to the sides.

"I don't want to be a burden… Besides, if there's anything I can do for our victory, I want to do it. I mean, we might not win at this rate. But we still have a method to get stronger, right?"

"…So you were listening in too after all."

Mio nodded a "Yes" to Maria's words.

"If the contract has such an effect, I don't mind. If we lose without having tried anything possible--- then I would find no peace in death."

And Mio wouldn't be the only one losing her life in a lost battle.

They were after her, but Basara and Maria, fighting with her, might get killed as well.

That alone she would never let happen.

"Still, you say so, but… do you know what'll happen to you?"

"……Yeah, probably. It'll be like when we formed the contract, no?"

"If you know all that---"

"---Even so, I want to get stronger!"

As if to ask why, Basara tightly clenched his fist.

"Of course… it's really embarrassing, to be honest… And I would have never thought that I could become like that. I got the feeling that I gradually stopped being myself and was really scared."

While lightly embracing her own body, Mio remembered the time when she formed the Master and Servant Contract with Basara.

On that day, where she laid her true nature, Naruse Mio called Basara brother for the first time. And while she felt numerous times a pleasure that nearly drove her crazy, she accepted Basara, who gave her this pleasure, as her Master.

The memories of that day were hazy, yet only the engraved pleasure remained vivid. Even now she sometimes dreamed about it.

Basara wasn't the only one conscious of the opposite sex while living under the same roof. Mio was the same.

"But…"

She didn't expect Basara to hold her so dear. She didn't want Basara to get the upper hand and sometimes teased him by wearing revealing clothes, yet Basara was thinking about Mio's well-being and endure it desperately every time.

…I have always been treasured.

The moment she overheard Basara and Maria's conversation from the hallway, Mio felt a shiver from deep inside her body.

It was a sensation on par or even greater than the one she had when she overheard the conversation with Yuki in the café about how Basara felt about her.

Therefore Mio showed a smile even while her face remained red.

"Thank you, Basara… for worrying about me. It made me really happy to hear that you're considering my feelings and slowly want to build up trust."

"Mio…"

Basara called her name, whereas Mio nodded with a "Yes".

"But I'll be fine… If enduring the embarrassment--- No, if pledging a greater loyalty by letting you subjugate me, can get us even a bit stronger, then I don't want to throw away this chance. I too want to become stronger together with you."

When she put her own feelings--- her wish into words and declared it to Basara,

"….."

Mio said nothing anymore and waited silent.

Because Naruse Mio knew the boy called Toujou Basara. That he wasn't the kind of man that would let her down after hearing all this, no matter how strong his feelings were for her. And,

"………….Okay."

Mumbling so before long, Basara let Maria get off his lap and slowly stood up.

And looking at Basara standing before her, Mio remembered the incident from the other day.

---The time when Basara had forcefully pulled her closer and covered her mouth with his hand. Mio had been in disbelief.

Not towards Basara. But towards herself, who couldn't resists while she was handled roughly like that.

She had been in the shameless attire of just a bath towel after coming out of the bath. When Basara had came at her, she had thought for sure that he would push and pin her down.

She had tried to resist at once. But when his hand went around her waist and forcefully pulled her closer, she couldn't resist at all, even though the curse of the contract hadn't even activated.

She had been herself--- A sane Naruse Mio, yet she could only think about how she should take on, how she should accept whatever Basara was going to do to her now.

Because Basara had fallen into a panic then, she was able to return to her senses.

…But.

If Basara had really tried anything back then, what would have happened to her?

The answer to that--- was told to her by the current Basara, who was different from back then now.

Basara's hand that softly touched her cheek slowly started to go down. Gliding down her neck and tracing her collarbone.

"Mm…"

When Mio let her body tremble a bit from the pleasure mixed in the ticklish sensation, her big breasts shook just as much.

Here it comes--- The moment she thought so, her breasts were fondled.

Her breasts were Mio's greatest weakness.

When her breasts were fondled directly at the end during the binding of the Master and Servant Contract, she had gone crazy at once, but this time she was wearing a shirt, albeit without a bra.

Fondled over a layer of clothes. Thus she had thought it wouldn't become so intense.

---However, she had been naive.

"Eh--- Thi, Ya…aahh!? Fuahn, FUAAAH!"

Even though the curse of the contract hadn't activated. Even though it happened over her clothes.

An unbelievable pleasure ran through her and Mio raised a sweet voice.

…Wh, Why…?

Along with her surprise, she desperately tried to hold back her voice, but the pleasure gradually grew more intense.

"Fuah, Mm…"

Losing the strength in her knees and waist, Mio was about to fall over, but Basara caught her.

"A- Are you okay…?" "N- No way… Why did I…?"

Basara asked surprised, whereas Mio became dumbfounded from the sudden and intense pleasure.

"That is no good, Mio-sama. Just because the curse has not activated, you cannot consider yourself to be like before."

Fufu, Maria laughed with that.

"Obstinate as you are, you just would not subjugate to Basara-san during the binding of the contract. The pleasure back then exceeded what a person could ever feel the normal way. And you had a taste of it nine times. Moreover, we all took a bath together and with time the curse activated numerous times too. From all this pleasure your body has become way more sensitive than before."

"No way… That's just…"

She couldn't believe it. Of course she comprehended that a person's body grew more accustomed to arousal the more it was exposed to pleasure. However, it hadn't even been one month since they formed the contract.

…My body has already started to be nurtured by Basara.

Basara laid Mio, who inadvertently shivered her body from that fact, onto the couch.

His face was a bit red. Even so, he looked deep into Mio's eyes and reached out his hands towards her.

"Ah…"

Understanding what Basara intended to do, Mio raised a short voice. Then Basara's hands, who had reached out for her chest, started to unbutton her shirt from top to down.

"Basara… You're gonna, look at my breasts?"

Even while saying so, Mio didn't resist. However, her embarrassment sky-rocketed after all and she averted her eyes a bit.

"…Perverted Basara." "That's not… no, that's right."

Basara didn't conceal his own feelings and actions. Regardless of that, he didn't apologize to her.

And Mio didn't oppose it either. She was going to submit to him now.

So she accepted it as best as she could.

His hands moved somewhat clumsy, but even then, it didn't take him too long to unbutton the front of Mio's shirt completely. With all the buttons undone, the shirt lost it's function as a one-piece and revealed the shorts she was wearing.

…Just like back then.

When they formed the Master and Servant Contract before--- her breasts were fondled directly in the end. At that time she wore a bra top, so it had been rolled up, but now that wasn't needed with the buttons undone.

I'll, have my breasts fondled directly again--- When that thought crossed her mind,

"…Ah, Basara-san. One develops a resistance against actions that were done to oneself previously. Of course Mio-sama has become more sensitive than before right now, but… I believe it will be more effective to go with a different approach."

"You think so…?"

On her words, Basara suddenly stopped his hands, which were on their way to Mio's breasts. And then,

"…Do you have any ideas? As a succubus, this must be your expertise."

Maria showed a smile to Basara's question.

"I want to live up to your expectations… That said, Mio-sama is still inexperienced, so I cannot give her a succubus' full course."

Let's see, with several seconds of considering.

"Well then--- How about you use this, since we already have it at hand?"

Saying so, Maria showed him an item.

"Maple syrup…?"

"Yes. Please spread this over Mio-sama's body… and use it like a lotion."

"H- Hey…!?"

Mio inadvertently alarmed herself, but Maria only intensified her smile.

"Your reaction shows how embarrassing it is for you… But shame is one of the most effective emotions to subjugate someone. ---Now then, go ahead, Basara-san."

"…………."

Basara had taken the maple syrup bottle from Maria and slowly opened the lid before long.

And then Mio saw the golden-brown fluid drop onto her own body.

It was pretty much like slow-motion. The liquid with a sweet fragrance dropped onto Mio's breasts and the syrup accumulated in her cleavage.

"Mm… Ahh…"

Mio's body, which was hot from the earlier bath and the fondling of her breasts by Basara, received a coldness--- And then preparations were done.

Mio prepared herself for the intense pleasure that Basara's hands, which were reaching out for her, would give her any moment now.

However, the action Basara took right afterwards was completely against Mio's expectation.

"Reminds me, Mio--- You were eavesdropping on us earlier."

"Eh… Th- That--- Mm!?"

Surely he chose the most effective method to subjugate Mio.

The flustered Mio felt guilty from having pointed out the fact about the earlier eavesdropping.

In the next moment--- the curse of the contract activated. Due to the aphrodisiac effect from the succubus characteristic, her senses sharpened to the maximum and when her breasts, covered in maple syrup, were fondled directly in that state,

….Eh?

Naruse Mio suddenly felt all her senses go blank.

Just what--- She only thought that for a second, then comprehended the situation.

When bumping your toe into some corner, there follows an abrupt absence of feelings before the pain comes.

A period of grace from God. Right now, she was experiencing the exact same thing.

Right after she comprehended that fact while her consciousness was on a higher state of fluidity,

"------"

A swirl of intense pleasure swallowed Mio entirely.

A world, where everything was colored in white.

Enveloped by a tender warmth, Mio received comfortable vibrations that made her doze off.

Incredible comfy and blissful--- That was all she could think about.

That state continued for a while.

"….Ah."

Suddenly the white fog cleared from her field of vision. However, she didn't know where she was. Thereupon,

"Ah--- Looks like she came to. Mio-sama, can you hear me?"

A young girl shook her hands in front of her eyes. But even though she saw her, her brain didn't process it. Nor did she find it unnatural to see that the girl was naked. She knew that the girl was saying something, but it didn't make it into her head. Instead,

…What's… this sound?

Mio heard a dripping sound from around her chest.

Just what's that, she thought absentmindedly, whereupon

"It seems she is still not out of it and does not comprehend her own situation…"

"---Are you okay?"

Suddenly a gentle voice sounded near Mio's ear.

…Who?

It was a voice that deeply penetrated her heart. Thereupon,

"Judging by this, it might be better to have her look at herself instead of explaining it to her."

Saying so, the girl in front of her left her field of vision once--- and after a while,

"…..?"

Suddenly Mio saw an unknown girl in front of her.

She was instinctively surprised. Because that girl was making such a lewd face. That expression full of lust with flushed cheeks reminded the spectator of a "woman" to the extent of gulping down their saliva. But,

"How is it? Do you understand now?" "Eh….?"

The face of the young girl from earlier showed up besides that girl. And when that young girl stood next to Mio, her appearance was next to that sexy girl for some reason.

"-----?"

And then, Naruse Mio finally realized. That the bewitching girl in front of her was herself. It was Mio herself, reflected in a mirror big enough for her to see her whole body. Only wearing the shirt as a sorry excuse, Mio was spreading her legs widely and straddling someone's lap.

And she saw that her breasts were being firmly rubbed from behind. Her breasts were wet and shiny from some kind of fluid, making lewd sounds every time they were fondled.

These breast gave off a fragrance sweet enough to choke on it and brought back Mio's consciousness. She turned around to her back at once.

There was Mio's Master--- The boy she swore her loyalty to.

"…Mio, can you tell?"

In what kind of situation she was in right now.

"Basara… Yah, I… Ah, Fuaaaaah?"

Her senses came back at once together with her consciousness, and the torrent of pleasure made Mio climax once again.

Her whole body convulsed on it's own and a shivering pleasant feeling ran through Mio.

"Ah, Ahh… Mm… Hah"

She didn't even have the time to close her eyes on the sudden happening. Thus, Naruse Mio witnessed the crucial moment.

Of herself reflected in the mirror. Of her face before it, during it--- and after it.

"Fufu. Mio-sama, you are making such a lascivious face…"

"Yah… No, Ah…"

Seeing herself in the mirror, Mio tried to cover her face with her hands at once. But she couldn't. Because she saw her self in the mirror exposing something that shouldn't be seen.

….N- No…

The plentiful maple syrup had dripped down from her breasts and ran down her belly over her navel, wetting the shorts she was wearing. Inside her shorts, which had become transparent from absorbing plenty of fluids, there was a warmth that couldn't have been brought forth by the cold maple syrup.

It was Mio's very own syrup, produced from the arousal. The shape of Naruse Mio's most embarrassing spot was distinctly raising to the surface. As she was a fellow female, Maria had followed her gaze and noticed her condition.

"N- No… This is…"

Mio hastily tried to smooth it over, but it was too late. Maria showed a faint smile, then

"Basara-san, listen…"

Of all things, she went around her back and whispered something to Basara. And then, "………"

Mio beheld how the Basara in the mirror quietly lowered his gaze--- At that moment,

"Ah, Ahh… Ahhhhh"

Having her own state exposed made her whole body pulse from an incredible shame.

"It's okay, Mio… It's not weird at all."

Basara, who was holding her, gently whispered into her ear. Words that meant that he was accepting Mio's most embarrassing appearance--- Having lost the need to put up an appearance, Mio let all her strength drain away from her body.

---She admitted her aroused self and accepted all of what Basara was doing to her.

That was why Mio was disturbed.

Every time her big breasts were fondled recklessly, she raised a dirty and lewd voice.

It were her breasts that were being touched, yet she couldn't stop herself from moving her hips indecently.

It was embarrassing, but that very embarrassment made Mio feel good beyond help and on top of Basara's lap, she got even more ecstatic--- Just like during the time when they formed the Master and Servant Contract. And then,

"Brother…"

Mio put her own hand on top of Basara's, which were fondling her breasts.

When her palm, seeking an existence to rely on, felt Basara's warmth, a relief came over Mio's whole body at once and the pleasure she was feeling on her breasts changed into bliss.

And she wanted more of that bliss. Before she noticed it, she had been gone in a posture of facing Basara.

Straddling him extremely close to his crotch, her breasts were naturally exposed right in front of his face. The big and soft swellings were already scurrilous wet from the maple syrup and their pink-coloured pointed ends were stretching like a budding flower bud.

…Did I turn crazy from the curse of the contract?

She wanted Basara to taste her breasts that had become the sweetest and lewdest in the world--- After all, she could submit to him better like that.

And Basara and herself could become stronger accordingly.

That being the case, she wanted him to dominate her thoroughly. This feeling gradually swelled up.

"….."

At last, Mio entwined her arms around Basara's neck.

Of course she herself couldn't speak out what she wanted him to do, but even so

"…Brother, please… My breasts are on fire, it's agonizing…"

Mio pleaded instead. And--- it worked. After Basara showed a surprised expression,

"Okay… I'll set you at ease now."

After tightly embracing her waist, he wrapped his mouth around her breast. Needless to say, it was her first time of having her breasts sucked. It felt way better than she had imagined.

"Ahh, Yahn, Hah… Mm, Broth- Brotheer… Mm, Fuaaah!"

Throwing back her head, Mio bended backwards in pleasure. The shirt she was wearing fell onto the ground and her upper body was completely naked, but she didn't care.

Overcome with a pleasant feeling of weightlessness, Mio twined her legs around Basara's hips and clingingly clasped his head to her chest. While her breasts were intensely sucked,

…W- Wow, what's this…

She knew that she was climaxing intensely. Befuddled by the overwhelming pleasure, she felt that the foundation of her current values was redrawn.

---And in time, Basara's existence inside Mio's head began to change to a different one from so far.

From a brother, family member and master in name only, to an absolute master, who she wanted to devote and submit herself to thoroughly.

The moment she thought so--- Mio and Basara's body were suddenly enveloped in light.

Mio was dumbfounded from not understanding the sudden happening, whereas Maria showed a calm smile.

"Congratulations--- That light is proof that the contract acknowledged that your relationship has advanced to the next level."

Remains of the hot pleasure were still glimmering within her, so Mio couldn't feel the change in her. But,

"Ah… The mark, on the neck…"

The collar-like mark on her neck had changed it's color to faint reddish.

"…Now, we have… become stronger?"

"Yes. Currently, you are getting a basic power-up, ranging from physical abilities to magical power. By the time that light has settled in, you two should be stronger than before. On the occasion, I allowed myself to suck up the arousal you felt, Mio-sama, so I too could gain a power-up for a week."

When she faced forward in a daze on these words, there was the boy she had pledged loyalty to from the bottom of her heart.

"You sure did your best…"

Saying so, Basara tried to pet her head, but as he remembered that his hands were covered in maple syrup, he was about to stop from touching Mio.

Therefore,

"----"

Mio took that left hand of his and put his fingers, from which the maple syrup was about to drip down, into her mouth. It was the hand of her master, which thoroughly engraved pleasure onto her breasts.

Upon that, the taste of maple syrup and an even sweeter pleasure spread in her whole mouth.

…I wonder, if I did alright in submitting to him.

While sucking on Basara's fingers, Mio thought so absent-minded.

But every time she licked with slurping sounds, a shiver of pleasure ran down her spine and in time, Mio became engrossed in licking his fingers.

Running her tongue over them numerous times, she minutely tasted every nook and corner.

And after she cleaned Basara's hand with her tongue, Mio finally let it go from her mouth and held that hand against her own cheek. With the hand of the boy that just dominated her on her cheek, she said softly like praying.

"…Let's win this."

Basara whispered back into her ear.

The simple, but reassuring four-lettered word of assent.

Part 5

Various voluptuous actions were conducted in the living room of the Nanjou House to deepen the Master and Servant relationship between Basara and Mio.

Some people watched a portion of that from beginning to end from outside. They stood on the rooftop of the neighboring house.

The ones that watched the happenings inside through the closed curtain, which was bypassed by magic, of the Nanjou House's living room were two demons--- Takigawa and Zest.

But,

"……"

No matter how stimulating that scene was, Zest, standing next to Takigawa, watched it calmly.

…Geez, what a pain.

The reason they were here wasn't because they were peeping toms or anything.

Surveilling Mio was Takigawa's mission and Zest too came here to check upon Mio's current surroundings on the order from Zolgear.

Thus they had seized Basara's and the girl's actual situation in the last few days.

That included the fact about the fight with Takashi and the others--- the Heroes that came to kill Mio. So they had observed Basara and the girls the whole time to see how they would act now.

But even though it was his mission to surveil them, Basara and Mio were still classmates to Takigawa.

Even by himself, it would have been pretty awkward to see a friend dripping wet, yet

…What do I do about this atmosphere?

It was awkward to no end. Valgar as a man would've been one thing, but Zest was a woman.

The past few days, Takigawa had skipped school and gone around with her--- An escort, so to speak.

Coming here wasn't Takigawa suggestion, but simply Zest's demand. Takigawa couldn't be held responsible at all.

However--- Even without responsibility, what kind of torture was it to have to watch a friend dripping wet together with a woman he wasn't all that close to?

There had to be a limit to unbearable situations.

That said, it wasn't like he was blaming Basara.

Basara surely would've never guessed that he was being watched and above all, it was Takigawa himself at the Yakiniku restaurant, who persuaded him to strengthen their Master and Servant relationship.

Apparently the bond between Basara and Mio had become one level stronger than before due to getting her dripping wet.

Of course they wouldn't be able to even hold their grounds against Takashi and the others just because of that, but at least they raised their chances out of the hopeless margin.

In that case,

"About time we scram. You wanted to check out Naruse Mio's household situation, but they seem to take a break now, so it should be enough now, shouldn't it?"

Takigawa suggested. But even when he was about to turn on his heel, Zest didn't move at all.

Instead she kept staring at the Toujou living room. While Takigawa got a bit fed up,

"Listen here… I want to get home and sleep before this gets any more awkward."

"Feel free to. It is my job to confirm Naruse Mio's change in the past half year."

Zest answered outright, pretty much unaffected from seeing all this.

"That boy from the Hero Tribe, Toujou Basara was it? He is rather interesting. Even while he feels reluctant to subjugate Naruse Mio, he still made use of the curse with the succubus characteristic out of necessity. To think he could make that obstinate Naruse Mio submit to him to that extent."

However,

"I already heard that their contract was formed around the succubus characteristic, but seeing her reactions, it appears Naruse Mio indeed has a sensitive body, like Sir Zolgear estimated. She seemed to be rather befuddled by the pleasure, but if she is already feeling so much from just these actions, then Sir Zolgear can give her much more pleasure. It should be an easy feast to budge her heart and snatch away her loyalty."

"Oh really. I congratulate you for being so devoted to your job. But to think that you didn't even bat an eye from seeing that, you even gauged her arousal. Nothing less from Sir Zolgear's right hand, you see things in a different light."

Takigawa shrugged his shoulders and on his sarcasm, Zest finally faced him with cold eyes.

"…Are you being sarcastic, Lars? If your statement just now should have been meant to insult my Master, then I would give an appropriate reply."

"No, no, not at all… I wouldn't dare. It was just admiration."

said Takigawa while laughing. He declared like he had finally found a point to tease her, who had been talking down to him the whole time, with.

"Even though you never had a guy before--- You act like you know what you're talking about. Well, I guess just by staying near Sir Zolgear, you get a bunch of chances to see such activities."

Zest fell silent for a moment on these words. Then she frowned.

"On what grounds do you claim---"

"---Unfortunately for you, I can recognize inexperienced women by their smell. Though they themselves don't notice it."

"…………….."

When he said nonchalantly, Zest shut up for sure this time. It eloquently indicated that what Takigawa said was the truth.

Zolgear came up with the entertainment of adding the aphrodisiac effect from the succubus to the curse of the Master and Servant Contract and had a bunch of female subordinators as his sex toys--- And Zest was his right hand.

Normally you would think that she would get first dibs on Zolgear, but

…That information seems to be valid.

Takigawa chuckled to himself like that. Half of it were rumours, but it said that Zolgear's most trusted right hand was more beautiful than any other of his subordinates--- but that was because she never had a man and the reason Zolgear could never lay hands on her.

---Incidentally, Takigawa, who was neither an incubus, nor a vampire, had no way to confirm a woman's chastity from her smell.

He had tricked her into believing that he knew her secret and confirmed the credibility of the information he got.

And at last, Zest noticed that as well.

"------"

For a moment, she gave him a stern expression, then she disappeared like melting into thin air.

"Well, I guess I pulled a fast one on her once…"

said Takigawa with a whiff of a smile. Zest's presence had vanished from the area. Most likely, she had pulled back for today.

"…Guess I'll leave too."

Lastly, Takigawa turned his attention back to the Toujou House one last time.

There Basara lifted Mio up and headed to the bath together with Maria. Well, he had done a magnificent lotion play with the maple syrup.

Surely it was in order to wash that sticky body.

"-----"

Basara put Mio down on the floor of the anteroom and tried to leave by himself, but Maria stopped him.

Apparently she was inviting him to take a bath together, since he was sticky as well.

Basara panicked. His earlier bold subjugating of Mio seemed like a lie now.

But in contrast to the bewildered Basara, Mio showed no signs of refusal, albeit she flushed her face embarrassed.

Most likely, her body was still on fire from the pleasure Basara had given her.

Before long, Mio stood up and hugged Basara from behind--- As to tell him not to leave. Basara, hugged by Mio wearing only shorts, froze up completely. Takigawa Yahirou made a wry smile.

"Well, go wild for today, Basacchi--- I'm praying that it won't be your last fun memory."

After declaring so by whispering, he also disappeared into the darkness of the night.

Part 6

And then the day of the decisive battle came. Since the battle would take place at night, Basara and Mio normally attended school without skipping.

After school they would meet up with Maria and head for the appointed place.

As for Yuki, she never came to school after that. She might be avoiding to meet him.

No wonder, since they would be enemies next time. Meeting up before the fight would confuse one's feelings.

Still, he had wanted to talk to her one more time before the battle.

…But

What could he say when they met? The current situation arose from Basara and Yuki making each their own resolve.

And then morning classes were over without having found an answer, making it lunch break now.

…Mio's together with Aikawa and Sakaki.

After watching Mio leave the classroom with her friends to eat lunch together, Basara too stood up from his seat.

Thanks to his connection with Takigawa, Basara wasn't isolated in class anymore now.

But even though he exchanged small conversations with others, he still wasn't close enough to someone to eat lunch together.

In the past ten days where Takigawa had been absent, Basara had eaten lunch by himself.

And since the other day, Mio and Yuki's fans didn't pick on him when he was alone.

He didn't believe that the incident in the courtyard ended their resentment, but he would be grateful if it could stay ambiguous like this.

While thinking about that, Basara went out of the classroom into the hallway, whereupon his homeroom teacher Sakasaki called upon him.

"Toujou. Takigawa's always absent these days, do you know anything?"

"No, nothing… He didn't contact you about it?"

"Well… On his first day of absence, I got a call from him saying that he's taking off school for a while due to family circumstances, but since then I haven't heard a word from him."

"I see…"

Takigawa hadn't been coming to school since the day after they went to eat Yakiniku together.

As for contact, only one mail came, saying there was a possibility of an attack from a demon of the Current Devil Lord faction.

Most likely--- he was busy with all kind of things too.

Clueless about these circumstances, Sakasaki scratched his head.

"Not only didn't I reach his apartment where he lives alone, no one answered the phone at his parent's house either.

I thought you might know something, since you're getting along with him… Nonaka's absent lately too. Is a weird cold going around?"

Saying so, he went away with his head cocked in puzzlement.

And the moment Basara was about to head out for the school store--- The cell phone in his pocket rang.

The displayed name field was blank. Thus Basara moved into a nearby storage room, looked the door while he confirmed that he was alone and finally picked up the phone.

"…Hello?"

"Oh, you're smart, Basacchi. Since you didn't call my name first thing, you seem to understand the danger of this call."

"Guess so…"

Because if someone had stolen Takigawa's phone and made the call, Basara's connection to Takigawa would've been exposed right away. And if that someone were from the current Devil Lord faction, everything would've been over.

"Well then, Basacchi, you at school, right? It's lunch break, but do you got time to speak?"

"Yeah, I moved somewhere isolated. Should be fine for a while. Anyway, you aren't coming to school and can't seem to be contacted… Are you okay?"

"Well, somewhat. Actually, a troublesome fellow besides the new observer popped up."

"…That means the devil that attacked us the other day was the new observer?"

"Yep. He was called Valgar, but the other one is even more troublesome. I only now found the chance to call you."

"I see… So? What's the reason you take the trouble to call me in this difficult situation?"

"Well, you yourself seem to be caught up in your own troubles."

Basara replied amazed to Takigawa's smirking words.

"I'm impressed you know about it… Could it be, you were watching from somewhere?"

"Take a guess. Anyway, the newly dispatched observer was killed. Of course I would look into who did it. Turns out a few Heroes crawled into this city and you guys have been doing nothing but training these days."

Oh right. Takigawa's mission was only to observe Mio.

Even if another devil was dispatched--- Even if that devil was killed, his mission didn't change.

"In other words, it's an encouragement call before the battle?" "---And a warning."

Takigawa's voice on the other side of the phone had a somewhat cold tone.

"Valgar got killed when he only went out to check things out, but… the orders he got should've not only included the stimulation of Naruse Mio's awakening, but her protection as well, to avoid losing Wilbert's power that's sleeping within her when she dies."

However,

"The guy that killed that very Valgar out of nowhere is after Naruse Mio. Sorry, but if the situation calls for it, I'll have to intervene. We'll dispose of those that try to kill her, with force--- Even if it should be Nonaka."

"….You!!"

To the surprised Basara,

"Hey, what're you surprised for, Basacchi? It's only natural. Let me tell you this while I'm at it. If you die, our agreement naturally becomes invalid. I mean, you're the only one that knows the truth and I'm just forced into cooperation through threatening."

Takigawa said sneering.

"Don't forget. We're only teaming up because it holds merit for both of us. If you also want to protect Nonaka along with Mio, then you've to win against these guys with your own strength."

These words that could be seen as a provocation, made Basara tightly grasp his phone.

"……Okay. Just watch, Takigawa, we definitely won't lose."

Toujou Basara declared outright.

"And let me tell you this as well. If you try to kill Yuki or the others, I'll definitely interfere--- Even if it makes me your enemy."

Part 7

Having finished his call with Takigawa, Basara stood still in the room for a while.

Then he made a sigh and unlocked the door to leave the storage room. Like that he opened the door that lead to the hallway--- but then stopped.

Because a girl was standing right in front of him.

"Yuki…"

It was Yuki, who was supposed to be absent from school today too.

She wordlessly pushed him back into the storage room and locked the door behind her back. And then,

"Please, Basara… I want you to withdraw from tonight's battle."

She said, slowly drawing closer. Clinging to him, her eyes that looked up to him at close distance were filled with sorrow rather than seriousness.

However, Basara shook his head.

"Can't do that... I believe I told so before already."

Both Basara and Jin had decided to protect Mio. Even if the enemy was the Devil Lord--- Or the Heroes.

"I understand your sentiment, Basara.... but the situation changed drastically from before. You should know what it means when a 'Surveillance Target' gets changed to a 'Termination Target'."

"....Yeah."

So far he was let off with as just an exile, but this time they would make an open enemy out of the Hero Tribe.

But Basara softly placed his hands on Yuki's shoulders, he looked right into her sorrowful, upturned eyes.

"Even so, I want to protect Mio... I'm no longer a Hero. I lost the qualification and obligation to protect this world. But right now, I'm her family, her brother. It's a fact that won't change by what kind of enemies I make or whatever harsh situation I'm in. So I'll fight to protect her--- I believe that's my obligation now that I've lost everything."

"...Even if you have to fight Kurumi and me?"

"Yeah..."

That was the only point he couldn't back down from.

...Besides

Takigawa currently had an even more troublesome fellow than that giant devil with him.

And he said that "they would interfere" if Mio's life was in danger.

In that case, that troublesome fellow would undoubtedly make a move as well.

---Basara wasn't taking the strength that Takigawa showed in the battles on the roof of the school or the forest the other days as his full potential.

Most likely, Takigawa was still hiding his true power.

And that very Takigawa called someone troublesome--- Where from that one's strength could easily be imagined.

If that strength exceeded his own or Takashi and the other's by far,

...Then that person would surely make a move.

That Shiba Kyouichi, who said he was only an overseer this time.

Therefore, to protect everyone, Basara and the girls had no choice but to drive away Takashi and the others. She then must have understood that Basara's determination couldn't be shaken.

".......I see."

Whispering isolated, Yuki slowly got away from him, turned on her heel and was about to go away. However,

"---Woah."

Basara hastily grabbed Yuki's arm. Because he couldn't let her go yet.

"Let go... We have nothing to talk about anymore."

Looking down sadly, she tried to shake off his hand.

"Sorry, but I wanted to give you something for sure when we met again."

Saying so, Basara took out the prepared item from his pocket and made Yuki take it.

"...A key?"

"A duplicate key--- to our house."

Basara smiled on finally handing it over, whereas Yuki widened her eyes in surprise.

"Why..."

"Back in the days when my father and I were in the village... you had a key to our house, right?"

"That was a long time ago. We both have changed now. Besides, tonight---"

"---Yeah, I know."

Basara nodded.

"But you know, Yuki... I don't want to give up on it despite that. That is, you naturally coming over to our house like in the past."

After all,

"We certainly might have changed--- But even then, it's not over between us yet. I don't want it to be over, never.... So I hope you'll take it."

Even when today ended and the next day came.

Basara didn't want to give up on the possibility for a future where Yuki used that key.

He wouldn't give up.

"-----"

In regards, Yuki didn't say anything any more. He thought she might refuse to, but she left the storage room wordless, still holding the key.

She didn't turn around to him, but Basara didn't mind.

He knew it was difficult. Still, he managed to see a possibility for the future he desired.

Later--- he would just have to take a hold of that future.

Part 8

Nine o'clock at night--- Still ten minutes left until the appointed battle.

Toujou Basara arrived in front of the station together with Mio and Maria.

Because it was the meeting spot arranged by Hayase Takashi.

Amidst the crowd of people, Basara looked around the area, whereupon

"---Yo, you came."

Suddenly Shiba Kyouichi appeared from the flood of people. Accompanied by Takashi, Kurumi and Yuki behind him, Kyouichi confronted Basara and the girls a few metre away.

"Okay, seems we're all here--- Shall we get started?"

"H- Hey, wait! Right here in this crowded place?"

Mio raised a disturbed voice. Basara was just as surprised. It was a weekend night, so more people passed by here than on a weekday's night.

So he had thought for sure that they would move to a more appropriate place for fighting without people from here on, but

"I understand your surprise. But in the past week, we checked various places in the city. There certainly were a few good places if we just wanted to avoid the public eye. The park or forest in the western part of the city where you trained at might be the most suitable."

But, Takashi, standing behind Shiba, drew onto his words.

"The places like that park or forest each have an important earth flow, which are the spiritual foundation for the city, running through them. We would mistake the means for the end if we end up destroying them, even if it's for the sake of defeating you guys."

"I see..."

Basara consented to Takashi's words.

---The Hero Tribe could use special powers as protectors of the world.

Amongst them were powers gained from contracts with Spirits or Divine Beasts, the messengers of Gods, and the contract merely lent them power for "righteous things".

So when they recklessly harmed nature or killed innocent living beings, even if it was in the name of defeating devils, they would fall into "disgrace" from these action and become unable to borrow the powers from spirits and such.

And above all, when they disrupted the stability of the earth flow, it was quite likely that large-scaled natural disaster would occur in the future.

"Besides, there is no cover in empty space and thus it's easier to damage the barrier directly. It would be a disaster if the barrier broke because of that."

said Shiba.

"But we don't have to worry about that here. Because we'll erect a barrier of the type that shifts dimensions and even duplicates the place. There are so many buildings around here, so even if we break anything, it would be the duplicates within the barrier and only we will enter into the barrier, no average people."

"But... the risk remains that the barrier will break."

said Maria.

"If we are going to fight, I believe we should at least do it in the middle of the night, where there are fewer people."

On these words,

"Oh boy… To think you, a devil, would be worried about others."

said Shiba with a sarcastic laugh.

"---We certainly considered that risk as well. The buildings around here are complex. Our Takashi and your Missy with the inherited power from the previous Devil Lord will set up the barrier together, but with just their two consciousnesses they regretfully cannot copy everything inside the width of the barrier. Therefore, we'll borrow the power from the people around here."

"So we're going to project their consciousness on the spatial structure inside the barrier."

Basara, who knew of that barrier type, announced it's function, whereupon Shiba showed a smile.

"Exactly. There are a lot of people around here right now and each of them feels the city by looking at it and hearing it's noise. They're basically like cameras--- They even see what we don't. Setting up the barrier with a concrete image like that will be in more detail and above all, more stable. Also, a complicated barrier that reproduces space like that needs more concentration for the construction, so it's harder for both of us to include any uncalled gimmicks."

Besides, said Shiba.

"No matter where and when we do it, we'll have to temporarily cease fighting anyway if the barrier breaks. So I don't think fighting right now in this place here is all that unfavorable to you guys."

"…What do you mean by that?"

Mio asked frowning, whereas Shiba shrugged his shoulders.

"I mean, we'll be unable to do anything when you purposefully lift or destroy the barrier--- in case you should get overwhelmed. Because it would endanger the nearby people."

Spreading his arms, he laughed.

"Must be nice--- To have no responsibilities or obligations to this world. Humans, animals, the city and nature mean nothing to you, right? It's really unfair, geez."

"---That's not!" "---Mio."

Mio inadvertently flared up on Shiba's provocation and Basara calmed her down by placing his hand on her shoulder.

"We just have to show them in the battle now that we have no such mindset. There's no need for you to fall for his provocation and lose your cool."

"……"

As frustrating it was, Mio nodded.

And Basara suddenly looked at Yuki, who stood behind Shiba.

But she didn't try to meet his look. Slowly casting her eyes down, she stood there with a sorrowful expression.

---However, Basara had no time to concern himself with her right now. Though that only applied to right now.

So Toujou Basara looked at Shiba again and declared.

"Fine. If that's what you want, we don't mind either--- Let's get started here."

Then the construction of the barrier began.

First of, Takashi pierced "Byakko" into the ground and with it as a go-between, Mio cast a barrier magic.

An average person with no special power could of course not see Mio's magic, nor the spiritual lance "Byakko".

Thus, Mio could erect the barrier calmly.

"----"

Naruse Mio let her own mind focus. The barrier's range was a sphere with a diameter of half a kilometer, centered around "Byakko".

Even if it was the enemy's weapon, the self-protective "Byakko" lent her power to erect the barrier, since it served to shield the surroundings.

At the same time Mio finished her chant--- the barrier magic, amplified by "Byakko", activated.

The surrounding buildings were reproduced in all kinds of "substances" and "shapes", giving the space within the barrier form.

But something disappeared in the progress.

It was the unrelated average people, who could absolutely not be dragged into this battle.

And by the time the barrier was about to be finished,

"Eh---?"

Mio suddenly raised a surprised voice. Their four opponents had been standing a few metre away--- And Shiba Kyouichi disappeared from them.

She was bewildered by the sudden happening.

"---Don't worry. I asked my "Byakko" to shut him out."

While Hayase Takashi told her indifferently, he pulled out "Byakko" from the ground.

"What do you mean, Takashi…?"

Basara asked doubtful.

"He's nothing but an overseer this time. Meaning, an outsider to this battle."

said Takashi.

"I don't want him to interfere with our battle if by any chance he's swayed by some kind of whim--- That's all to it."

"….I see."

Basara mumbled back to Takashi's words. Seeing their expressions, Mio thought.

That these two surely held some kind of sentiment towards Shiba, which Maria or Mio couldn't understand.

…Most likely.

There were still plenty of points Mio didn't know about Basara.

Compared to Yuki and Takashi, the time she spent with him was utterly lacking.

Still, Mio stood here after deepening the trust between him and her in her own way.

She ought to have done everything she could. And then,

"---It's time. Let's get started."

After saying so, Takashi flashed "Byakko" diagonally into the air, then slowly turned his back to them and returned to Yuki and Kurumi.

"……."

Realizing his intentions, Mio and the others started to take their distance as well. At the same time, the top part with the light of a nearby street light was cut off and slowly started to fall onto the ground.

And in the moment a clattering announced the impact onto the ground, everything began to move.

The battle had started.

Fixing your Eyes on the irrevocable Past

Part 1

The very moment the battle started.

Takashi saw Basara come rushing at him while materializing Brynhildr.

The sudden takeoff and acceleration from a speed type.

---However, Takashi remained calm. Same for Kurumi and Yuki who were next to him.

Making a quick move as soon as the battle started was nothing uncommon. It was a tactic close to an ambush, conducted by the party that was inferior in strength.

Thus, Takashi chose to make a move himself too.

The same acceleration of a speed type closed the distance between them in an instant.

"HAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" "OHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

"Byakko" and Brynhildr--- Their attacks clashed. But the resistance was different from what he had expected.

…So that's how he's gonna play.

Takashi understood Basara's plan, who was right in front of him, at once and approved it in his heart.

They both had launched a downward attack. But Basara had done so to ward off his attack, not as an attack itself. Now he tried to get into his reach.

"Heh…"

But Takashi jumped to the side by kicking the ground and swung "Byakko" edgewise while turning in midair.

An attack outside of Brynhildr's reach that worked because "Byakko" was a spear. But only the hollow sound of cutting through air followed.

Takashi had hit only empty air.

"---What?"

Without decreasing his speed, Basara had slipped past Takashi, heading towards Kurumi and Yuki.

---It was a three vs. three. An important point was who took on whom.

After taking Shiba the overseer out of the game, Takashi - Yuki and Kurumi had currently the upper hand without a doubt.

After all, the Elders had given permitted him to take "Byakko" with him to eliminate Mio.

Knowing Basara's personality, he had thought for sure that he would be facing him, but

"If that's the case---"

Takashi returned his gaze from Basara's back to the front.

"---Correct." "That's right."

He saw the little succubus girl and Naruse Mio make a move against him ten metre away at the same time.

The succubus girl--- Maria punched her right fist into the ground, whereupon a destructive wave came at Takashi, who was running over the asphalt. Moreover,

"Take this too!"

Countless fireballs filled the air and they were released at Takashi all at once--- Right afterwards.

Shock waves and explosions engulfed him.

While hearing continuous shock waves and explosions behind his back, Basara rushed forward.

There were two girls in the field of his vision. Yuki and Kurumi.

Kurumi was already chanting, but Yuki hadn't even materialized her spirit sword "Sakuya".

She must have still been hesitant to fight him.

Therefore, Basara fixated his gaze on the opponent he had decided on before the battle.

"Here I go---Yuki!"

Basara raised Brynhildr against Yuki, who still had no will to fight.

"---Like I would let you!"

But a strong gust sent Basara flying before he could launch his attack.

"Kuh…"

The gusts interlinked and became a storm, raising Basara up into the air at once.

He was forcefully blown up so high that he could see the beautiful night scenery of Tokyo.

An altitude of a few hundred meters.

Basara inadvertently gulped, since he would die instantly when he fell from such a height, and suddenly heard a cold voice.

"---I never expected you to go after my sister from all of us."

Basara reflexively looked up over his shoulder, where Kurumi already had finished setting up a magic circle, as she most likely rode an even faster wind up there.

"How much more do you intend to hurt her until you're satisfied…?!"

At the same time she shouted that, a torrent of fierce gusts was set loose at point-blank range.

He launched a counter with Brynhildr immediately, but Kurumi's wind eluded his attack like it possessed a will of it's own and directly hit him just like that.

"---AAWWWWWW!"

With no ground under his feet, he couldn't maintain his posture.

Taken in by the strong wind, Basara started to fall to his death.

…Damn, if I could at least break it up…!

He could try out a <Banishing Shift> that would only repelled the wind that was restricting him, instead of erasing it, but

"…Damn!"

He had his hands full just holding onto Brynhildr so it wouldn't be blown away, since its broad frame picked up a lot of wind pressure.

Even if he managed to swing an attack, activating <Banishing Shift> was totally out of the question.

While he fell like that, the ground gained on him.

…Fine!

Reading the flow of the wind, Basara used all of his strength to slow down his body.

"---Right there!"

He vertically kicked the wind that swept over him. He aimed for the point where the knotty interlinked gusts converged from time to time---

By kicking that temporary lump of air, it served as a foothold in midair.

Basara narrowly escaped from the wind torrent and landed on top of a building by twisting his body in the air.

At the same time, he immediately turned around and launched a horizontal swing, which scattered the wind blades that came after him.

And then,

"---------"

Kurumi rode on the wind down to the rooftop, apart from where Basara was standing.

Nonaka Kurumi looked at Basara, who poised and faced her with a calm expression. Therefore,

"…Hmp. So you were actually after me."

Having seen through his plan, she mumbled so.

Indeed. He had shown signs of going after Yuki in the beginning to create this one-on-one situation.

He anticipated that she would flare up when he went after Yuki by intentionally calling her name, and even the actions she would take to stop him.

"You sure are looking down on me…"

Kurumi was well aware that Yuki would be no use in this battle, because she still hadn't found the resolution to fight him.

With Shiba out of the picture as well, it was only Takashi and Kurumi fighting.

That said, she didn't think Mio and Maria by themselves would be able to win against Takashi with his "Byakko".

…In short,

Basara assumed he could defeat Kurumi by himself. He must know as well that Kurumi's abilities were restricted in the present situation.

Without a doubt, he intended to defeat her as fast as possible, then head over to Mio and Maria to defeat Takashi together.

Surely even now, Basara considered Kurumi as the same as five years ago--- the little sister that always followed around behind him and her older sister Yuki.

In that case, "I'll make you realize your mistake--- while you drown in the regret of having lost to me!"

Saying so, Kurumi emitted a green aura and released her magic power.

Part 2

"Oh, I knew it. He went after her… Well, not like there was any other way."

Driven out of the barrier, Shiba Kyouichi had checked the situation inside from a rooftop of a distant building.

He showed a faint smirk as the battle unfolded just like he predicted.

He speculated beforehand that Takashi would shut him out of the barrier, since Takashi was driven by various emotions in this battle.

Therefore, Shiba wasn't bewildered. He couldn't look through the barrier, but his own ability allowed him to feel the happenings (events) inside the barrier.

---In a variety of his scenarios, Basara would choose Kurumi as his opponent.

Back when Basara was still in the <Village>, the lively Kurumi had been like a little sister to Basara, like the docile Yuki.

If he was forced to fight her now, he must be thinking of making her unable to fight by making her pass out or something by himself without involving Mio and Maria.

And if he was fighting Kurumi, he could also draw Yuki's attention to him.

Even if she was passive in the fight against Basara's team, she couldn't ignore a fight between her beloved childhood friend and her little sister.

In fact, Shiba felt how Yuki was trying to rush toward Basara and Kurumi.

…Still,

This development was ideal for Basara's team, but not the very best one.

Even if it was a two-on-one, Takashi's "Byakko" was a special spirit lance that the <Village> allowed him to take out in order to defeat the daughter of the previous Devil Lord.

Their tactic puts a huge burden on Mio and Maria, who had to fight against Takashi.

That said, Basara and the girls must know that as well. After launching continuous attacks, Mio and Maria were now taking their distance from Takashi to avoid fighting.

That behavior made it obvious that they wanted to buy time until Basara arrives and Takashi noticed that as well.

"Well, not that I can't relate to it…"

Basara's team wasn't after a simple victory of this battle.

The <Village> had assigned Naruse Mio as a Termination Target and she was targeted by a hostile faction of the Devils.

Even if the only way to protect her meant fighting, Basara should know better than anyone how big the risk was to seriously turn the Hero Tribe against them under these circumstances.

Furthermore, his opponents were his close childhood friends. He must have wanted to avoid harming them as much as possible, but

"Being kind at a time like this is all fine, but you never learn your lesson, huh Basara."

Saying so, Shiba Kyouichi laughed coldly.

"If you're too greedy, you'll lose everything again. Just like five years ago---"

Part 3

There was a quiet sound in the dim empty space.

It was Hayase Takashi's footsteps on the linoleum covered floor.

After he warded off Mio and Maria's continuous attacks, he chased after them, they were avoiding further combat; going into the large shopping mall in front of the station.

Although no other people were inside the barrier, the mall had various floors and endless space, since it consisted of three buildings connected through passageways. The perfect location to hide and buy time.

---However, that only applied if Takashi was without his "Byakko". Byakko had the duty to protect the west, so when there were hostile enemies in its entrusted region, it could vaguely sense their whereabouts.

"…That way, huh."

Following "Byakko's" reaction, Takashi set foot onto the fourth floor of building B. It was a fashion floor that dealt with woman clothes. The floor had its power turned off with only the emergency lights on.

…Did they break the breaker in the fuse box?

The barrier reproduced the state of affairs, not just the material.

Even so, by destroying the breaker, it was possible to create a state of affair corresponding to that.

The ambushing side was at an advantage, since they could be mistaken as a merchandise's shadow in the darkness. But Takashi slowly proceeded to the center of the floor.

"I know you're here--- Come out."

He declared so in a calm tone to these two, but there was no response, as they were thinking that they hid well. So Takashi started moving west--- towards the end of the floor.

At that moment,

"------"

The surrounding atmosphere became a bit tense. Basara must have told them how dangerous it was when Takashi with "Byakko" got on their west side.

Suddenly--- a mannequin came flying at Takashi with a buzz. He cut it in half with "Byakko" in one swing.

Then,

"---Over there, huh."

At the same time he muttered, he kicked the floor.

When he dashed into the direction the mannequin had come from, a couple more mannequins came flying.

Takashi went on dodging them within a hair's breadth by making sidesteps, whereupon he spotted a small silhouette in the dim passage ahead--- It was Maria.

Takashi accelerated at once, closed the distance between him and her and was about to be in reach for his "Byakko".

But right before,

"What---?"

He frowned with a light surprise. Maria, who he had thought would run for it again, showed a movement against his expectation.

She laughed.

"---Here I go."

Saying so, Maria kicked the ground and leaped forward--- towards Takashi. Bending her small body, she launched a flying kick by rotating her waist horizontal.

"------"

Takashi immediately went into defense. Maria wasn't the only opponent.

If he carelessly dodged and took his distance, it was quite likely that Mio would shoot him with her magic there.

Therefore he blocked Maria's kick with "Byakko's" shaft.

"Guh---… Wha!?"

Unable to stop the blow that exceeded his expectation by far, Takashi flew sideways through the air.

While he went flying through the display of a nearby fashion shop for little girls, Takashi nonetheless adjusted his posture in midair and landed gliding on the ground.

There,

"Now, here comes more!"

She closed the distance between them at once with a jolly voice.

Entering even further into "Byakko's" reach--- she unleashed continuous punches and kicks at close range.

By a sudden turn, Takashi was forced to evade. In fact it was dangerous to take her on carelessly, since these powerful attacks were coming merciless after Takashi one after another.

…What's going on?

He had checked upon the succubus' power one week ago.

Sure, she wasn't an opponent to lower your guard against, but she definitely should have been at a level where he could defeat her by himself.

Of course he didn't expect her to sit by idly the last week. She must have trained together with Basara.

…Still,

Her current power had remarkable gone up compared to one week ago. No, not just her power. All of her physical abilities had leapt up. As if she was seeing through his surprise,

"Too bad for you. Thanks to Basara-san and Mio-sama, I brimmed in various ways."

she said so and increased the force in her attacks even more. Moreover, while fighting at close range, she was always positioning herself so that he won't have his back to the west. However,

"Like I would let you… do as you please forever!"

Not missing the opening between Maria's continuous attacks, Takashi went on the counterattack.

He couldn't activate "Byakko's" power, but he cornered Maria by combining thrusts and slashes--- straight and curved attacks.

And then he finally landed an upward cut from below.

But--- The resistance Takashi felt was not from cutting her apart.

"…What?"

Hayase Takashi looked. Maria had stopped "Byakko's" blade with her crossed thin arms.

---Sure, a power type had high physical abilities. The giant devil from the other day that did not even need to dodge Basara and Maria's attacks was the perfect example. But it was unexpected that a small girl like her could block his attack, even if she was a succubus.

…Seems I have to reconsider.

Takashi had deemed Maria strength to be B-class, but now recognized it as A-class. And then,

"---Howl, "Byakko"."

Right away, a whirlwind appeared around "Byakko" and sent Maria flying back, diagonally upwards, into the air.

"Ahhhhhhhh---!?"

Maria's small body crashed into the ceiling in no time. Breaking through the ceiling like that, she was sent flying to the next floor together with a shock wave, where soon another crash sounded.

Most likely, Maria was even blown through the next ceiling.

"You were unlucky…"

Takashi said while looking at the fragments falling down from the broken ceiling.

---To release "Byakko's" full power he certainly needed to be on the enemy's west side.

However, that didn't mean that "he couldn't attack at all when he wasn't on the west side".

Although not at full power, he could release "Byakko's" power for a local attack on the spot.

Just like the attack that pierced and froze the giant devil the other day or the whirlwind against Maria just now.

That said--- Maria's current strength wasn't to be scoffed at. It was unlikely she was defeated by that. Takashi shortly pondered whether he should go after Maria to finish her or get rid of Mio at once.

"------"

He turned around to the presence that suddenly popped up behind him--- in the west. There stood a single girl.

Emitting an surging crimson urge different from the black aura of the previous devil lord and the blue one from the moderate faction, Naruse Mio had already expanded a magic circle in front of her.

"Speed is the pride of a speed type, right? … Then how about this?"

At the same time she said that, a large quantity of water appeared.

It turned into a stream that swallowed up the whole floor and Takashi was dragged into its stream at once.

Part 4

Basara found himself moving at high speed in a genuine fight against Kurumi.

Kurumi was a magic type, capable of long-range attacks, whereas Basara was a speed type.

First he needed to get close to her with his speed or he wouldn't stand a chance. Kurumi freely flew through the air by controlling the wind while Basara jumped from rooftop to rooftop of the different sized building.

With the speed of a speed type and the strength of his legs that produced that speed, Basara took off from the edge of the rooftop and jumped.

"HAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

He shouted along with a flash of Brynhildr, but

"---You don't know when to give up."

Kurumi evaded it easily. The surrounding wind lifted Kurumi's body up.

...Damn.

He had tried to land hits on her for a while now, but she would dodged them all like this. Nonaka Kurumi was the same magic type as Mio. Her magic-orientated battle style was same too.

However, Mio was a High Wizard that chanted her magic directly with her own magic power, in contrast to Kurumi, who was an Element Master who borrowed the spirits' power to activate magic.

Therefore she could chant magic by employing or contracting a spirit through a channel without consuming her own magical power.

A troublesome opponent---

However, Basara saw a way to prevail this time specially because of that fighting style. Because "Byakko", which had it's power as a mythological guardian beast sealed, was nearby.

Therefore he figured that Kurumi could only utilize the wind attribute of "Byakko" in this fight, since opening channels to other spirits would interfere with "Byakko's" power.

Furthermore, the barrier was set up from Takashi's "Byakko" and Mio's magic.

As an ally of Takashi, Kurumi likely could only cast wind magic inside the barrier. And as a matter of fact, Kurumi had only used wind magic so far and her materialized spirit gauntlet had still wind as the main element too.

Thus it should also be difficult for her to attack towards the west, since "Byakko" would interfere.

---However, Kurumi's wind showed no signs of such a handicap.

To begin with, wind was polymorphous. No matter how often Basara got on her west side, the wind attack him by simply going round. He somehow tried to retaliate while narrowly dodging these attacks, but

"Kuh...!"

as he evaded an attack, he ended up landing on the wall of a high building in his way and he started running up the wall vertically at once. One attack after another hit into the white wall always one step behind him.

It was Kurumi's gale magic. As Basara escaped upwards, the attacks gradually closed in on him.

"----?"

Basara had his attention to his back, when "something" invisible approached from the top that winded up the surrounding air.

Basara kicked off the building at once and jumped towards the wall of the building across the street. Right afterwards, the "something" he dodged crashed into the ground.

After he heard that roaring sound while in midair, Basara pierced Brynhildr edgewise into the wall of the building he had jumped to, spun his body upwards with his right hand on the handle and landed on the broad blade of the sword.

"Just now, that was..."

When he looked down at the ground, he saw a wide crater that had a three metre radius under the rising cloud of dust.

She probably shot compressed air or something like that.

"...You're good at running away as ever."

When he suddenly looked up, there floated Kurumi--- ten metre away at the same height as him.

---So Basara moved at once.

He jumped towards her, using Brynhildr as a stepping stone. Since he had abandoned his weapon,

"What the... A desperate suicide attack?"

Kurumi wearily held out her hand towards him and unleashed a wind magic. At the same time, Brynhildr vanished behind Basara--- and re-materialized in his hand.

Kurumi's expression became frightened upon the unexpected feint.

Basara cancelled out her gale magic with Brynhildr's blade right in front of her and drew near her in the same movement.

"OHHHHHHHHHHHH"

He launched a horizontal slash. However, it was repelled by something invisible right before hitting Kurumi's stomach.

It was a magical barrier that she had immediately erected to defend.

Still, if it was the same barrier from five years ago, he should be able to cut through it. That he was warded off proved how much stronger Kurumi had gotten.

And then Basara got a taste of Kurumi's newly gained strength.

He hung motionless in the air in the moment his attack was repelled and suddenly felt the atmosphere accumulating around Kurumi---

In the next moment,

"---GAAAAAAAAAAAH!?"

Basara was blown away from a violent torrent of turbulent air. He crashed into the wall of the building behind him, broke through it back first and kept flying even though he got caught in various chairs and desk of the office inside.

After he repeatedly crashed through walls with an impact, he clashed into a huge steel locker. The content poured out with a noise on that impact.

"Gah..... Guh.... Ah....!"

Basara had sunk into the demolished locker with a crucifixion posture. He spit out blood along with all the oxygen in his lungs. Unable to breath from the impact on his whole body, his vision blurred from the intense pain.

"---That's what you get for looking down on me and treating me like a kid."

Kurumi slowly walked down the path of her shock wave--- all the way to where Basara had been blown to.

Then she stopped not far away from him.

"You... have only attacked me with the back of your sword so far. Even at a time like this, you think you can make the <village> reconsider their decision on Naruse Mio if you show off a strength that defeats us without hurting us?"

In reply to these acrimonious words,

"...Is that, bad...?"

Basara said groaning, then slowly stood up by holding onto the edge of the locker.

"My dad and I decided to protect Mio and Maria... To protect the girl that has to fear for her life just because she's the previous Devil Lord's daughter and inherited his power. But"

For that goal, Jin had told him to fight after drawing a line. The school nurse Hasegawa also advised him to just protect the line he would never back off from.

However,

"But can I only pick one precious thing...? I don't want to fight you--- my childhood friends and former comrades. Maybe there's a way to end this without fighting. Even if the chance for that is small, is it such bad thing to gamble on that chance?"

He knew that his wish was utopistic. Still, Toujou Basara didn't want to back down.

Amongst the ones he definitely wanted to protect--- behind that drawn line were Mio and Maria.

However, Toujou Basara had drawn a final protective line too, which included those he never wanted to lose.

Amongst them were not just Mio and Maria, but Yuki, Kurumi and Takashi as well.

No matter how rationally he thought about it, he didn't want to back down from that one line. However,

"Not really. Do whatever you want. Just keep crying for your Utopia until the end while getting beaten to a pulp. In the end, you'll regret your naivety to death anyway."

Kurumi started to focus the wind around her right hand, held out towards him. And then,

"Because when you wake up again--- Naruse Mio won't be in this world anymore."

At the same time she declared so, her wind was unleashed upon Basara.

What Kurumi released was a mass of air compressed to the limit.

It had a diameter of 1 metre. Hit by that in the stomach, Basara was robbed of his consciousness this time for sure.

---Or so it was supposed to be.

But,

"Eh---..."

Kurumi muttered dumbfounded. Because the magic she released vanished right in front of her eyes.

And without a trace.

...Don't tell me.

On a look, Basara in front of her ended his swing of Brynhildr.

<Banishing Shift>--- In the moment she remembered the name of the skill he could no longer use, he had already drawn near her.

Kurumi tried to erect a barrier against the incoming attack, but she couldn't.

...No way...?

It didn't just erase the wind magic, but also the channel to the spirit?

By the time she realized that, Brynhildr was already before her.

"----!"

It was too late for a backward jump.

Kurumi realized that fact not from the pain of the horizontal slash, but from being sent flying through the air.

In her path was a broad window front. Quite the useless object to stop Kurumi's momentum.

With a shrill clinking, Kurumi's body was blown outside the building.

Since her channel to the spirit was severed, she couldn't use magic.

Her inevitable fall began. Her body wouldn't move, maybe due to the impact of the attack, and she could do nothing but look up to the night sky as she was falling backwards. She fell from the fourth floor. Falling onto her legs would be one thing, but crashing into the ground with this posture was hopeless---It was over.

...Sis...

Kurumi suddenly thought of her older sister. They had always been together.

She knew of Yuki's feelings, but Kurumi herself couldn't forgive Basara for putting Yuki through so much sorrow--- and trampling all over her feelings, as she had desperately gotten stronger in the past five years.

Would Yuki be sad over her death? And--- would she take vengeance for her?

...But,

Kurumi suddenly closed her eyes. She didn't want Yuki to fight against Basara after all.

After all, Yuki had gotten stronger for Basara's sake. She worked so hard for that.

So Kurumi wanted to spare her at least a fight to the death against---

"---Eh?"

As she was suddenly tightly embraced, Kurumi opened her eyes in a flash. The person in question

"Y- You..." "Stay still!" "----!"

told her so in a harsh tone and Kurumi reflexively stopped trying to move.

Still holding her in his arms, Basara turned his body vertically--- and landed on the ground.

"-----"

Basara was injured too. Moreover, he was holding Kurumi.

The impact from the landing wouldn't kill him, but his legs should have received quite the shock.

However, Kurumi felt nothing of such a vibration.

Because right before the landing, she was embraced stronger than that by him. And then,

"...Seems we're safe somehow..."

Basara made a sigh of relief while still carrying her in his arms. Kurumi was enveloped by his voice that had became lower in the past five years and his grown body that overshadowed her while she was held.

...Ah.

In response to the tight embrace, Kurumi said with a powerless voice in his arms.

"...L- Let me go." "Mh? O- Oh... sorry."

Then, Basara finally let go off her, but he hastily averted his eyes from her.

When Kurumi lowered her gaze on herself puzzled, she saw that her clothes were greatly torn on her right side, exposing her bare skin.

It reached from under the swelling of her breast up to near the tip of it.

"N- No...----!?"

The moment she hastily tried to cover her breasts, a fierce pain ran through her whole body and suffocated her. Kurumi got onto her knees from that and Basara gently held her around the waist to support her, while saying.

"Are you okay? Wait, I did that to you... Sorry."

"...Idiot... Worrying about your enemy, that's exactly what I meant by looking down---!?"

The instant she tried to raise her voice, a reverberating pain befell her. She most likely broke a rib or two.

After all, she was hit by Basara--- by the thick sword Brynhildr, even if it was just the back of the sword. She was lucky that she didn't suffer more from it. It could be that Basara weakened Brynhildr's momentum at the last moment.

...Besides.

If Basara hadn't saved her, she would have crashed into the ground head first and died.

With slightly tearful eyes from the pain in her side, Kurumi looked up at Basara.

Basara's eyes, as he looked at her worried and crouched down, were the same as the time as when they were together in the past.

...I see.

Even if everything had changed after five years, Kurumi was still like a younger sister to Toujou Basara.

But rather than treating her as a kid, he was treasuring her as a family member--- And that feeling was

...The same for me...

Even if she could never forgive. Even if the <Village's> order was absolute.

Nonaka Kurumi realized what kind of existence Toujo Basara was to her.

---It wasn't just Yuki, who stayed by Basara's side and kept looking at him from a small age on.

Because Kurumi herself stayed with these two and kept watching Basara's back and side-profile, too.

As she closed her lips and looked up at him wordlessly,

"You seem fine, seeing as you can glare at me like that..."

Basara slowly stood up.

"...Sorry, if possible, I would like to stay with you until you can move again, but---"

Saying so, Basara turned his gaze towards the station. When she followed it,

"Sis..."

Yuki was slowly coming over from the other side of the street.

Kurumi thought for sure that she had been worried about their fight.

And that she came over here, ignoring Naruse Mio, for that reason. However,

...Sis?

Yuki raised her slightly lowered head and looked at her. She wore a peacefully expression that made it hard to guess her emotional state.

Even so, Kurumi recognized an emotion in that expression and was astonished.

When she hastily looked up at Basara next to her,

".......Yuki."

He must have already noticed it too. Basara mumbled, but didn't materialize Brynhildr despite of it. As to show that he didn't want to fight her by all means.

"............"

But Yuki came to a halt and wordlessly called out her spirit sword "Sakuya"--- In the next moment, she launched a reverse and slantwise slash from afar.

Seeing that, Basara immediately bent his knees a bit.

Defense for a speed type was basically evasion. And his movement was a preparation for that. However,

"No.... Basara, block it!"

Kurumi shouted at once. But it was too late.

"---?"

An attack hit Basara from downright. The moment it hit, there was a dull sound of a blow instead of a slash. It hit his chin, rattled his brain and made him tumble towards the ground. Kurumi hastily caught his body, ignoring the pain that ran through her body by doing so.

"....Sis, why...?"

Wasn't she against fighting him? In reply to her question,

"....I can't think of any other solution."

When Yuki crouched down in front of her eyes, she pulled out a bottle from her pocket, opened its lid and held it in front of Basara's face, who had passed out.

This sweet fragrance was an aroma that was passed down within the Tribe to put the target into a deep slumber.

Vulnerable as he was from having passed out, Basara breathed it in.

"Now he won't wake up for half a day..."

Yuki softly touched Basara's cheek and showed a gentle expression for only a moment. And then,

"Kurumi... Take care of Basara."

"What are you going to do...? Don't tell me---"

Yuki didn't answer. She stood up wordless and went away like that.

Towards the station--- Towards the other battlefield.

Part 5

What Maria saw first after coming to her senses was Mio's face as she looked her worried.

"......Mio-sama?"

Maria noticed that Mio was helping her to sit up.

"Oh right… The attack from that man got me."

She remembered how she was hit by the shock-wave from "Byakko" at point-blank range in the middle of the battle.

When she looked around, she saw a similar scenery from the floor she was on before.

She was probably one floor higher up, on the fifth floor. And it seemed that she hadn't been out cold for that long.

"Where's that man…?"

"I somehow managed to land a hit on him… Thanks to you."

"Can you stand?" being asked that, Maria headed for the nearby 2m wide hole in the ground together with Mio.

Looking down from there, she saw that the fourth floor, which had been their battlefield, was flooded. The lower floors most likely looked the same.

---This had been Maria's and Mio's tactic. Maria bought time with close range combat, while Mio concentrated to use the water in the water pipes and tanks throughout the building for her offensive magic.

She launched all of it when there happened to be a distance between Maria and Takashi.

"That should've gotten us a bit of---"

Midway in her sentence, Mio staggered and then got down on one knee.

"Mio-sama, cancel the magic. Any more than this will be…!"

The building wasn't perfectly airtight, so she had to maintain her magic to prevent the water from leaking out of the building.

Needless to say, it consumed a lot of magical power to control such a large mass of water.

"But… we've to buy time until Basara comes…"

Mio said so with a painful expression--- At that time.

A large whirlpool started to form in the water that filled up the fourth floor.

"This is…"

Maria widened her eyes in surprise. Immediately afterwards a fierce vibration emerged that repelled the atmosphere on the fourth floor.

That shock-wave, spreading sideways, blew off the walls and windows on the floor.

She might have been able to keep the water inside if it had been small cracks, but not like this. The enormous amount of water spilled out of the building.

"----"

Maria and Mio had their breath taken away.

Hayase Takashi stood composed on the still flooded fourth floor while the water drained away.

The reason his body, let alone his clothes, weren't wet was because he had erected a wind barrier around him with "Byakko's" power.

And releasing that onto his surroundings must have caused that shock-wave just now.

"I see… This building is standing in the west of the center of the barrier. That being the case, you considered yourself to be in the west and could use the guardian beast's power for protection."

"…Seems your head isn't just a decoration."

Takashi replied indifferently to Maria's strained words.

…This certainly has become grave.

Maria realized at once that they were inferior.

"Let us go, Mio-sama… We are getting away from here. We will hide somewhere and buy some---"

"---Useless. No matter where you hide, 'Byakko' will find you, my enemies."

"Besides," said Takashi.

"It seems you desperately tried to avoid that I stand westward from you, but--- you're too naïve."

"What do you mean…?"

Mio asked doubtful.

"In China, the Four Gods, including Byakko, are made-up from star constellations, but in Heian-kyou they merely originated from Feng Shui based geographical features--- from the land. And… it certainly is true that

Byakko, as the guardian of the west, has to watch out the most for invasions from the east."

Saying so, Takashi aimed "Byakko" at them.

It's blade suddenly started to emit a light. That light gradually converted (converged) at the spear's tip and before long, the atmosphere started to rumble.

"However, as you know, opposite of Byakko's west, the Azure Dragon is safeguarding the east. The flying Dragon rules over the water and obviously can make it rain. It protected the capital from droughts with that power. Wouldn't it be natural then that Byakko also protected the capital with a power contrasting it? With a power against floods and such--- A power that blows away rain clouds."

"You mean…"

She mumbled dumbfounded.

"You were careless. This guy cannot only utilize it's power against an eastern enemy--- but also against the sky."

They had no time to flee. Nor to raise a voice. And then,

"Sick'em---'Byakko'"

The moment Hayase Takashi declared, a flash burst open that mowed down everything.

The howl from "Byakko" pierced through the heavens.

A fierce shock-wave emerged. And then--- after the long, long roaring sound and the vibration calmed down,Takashi's snow-white vision finally cleared up.

"Byakko" had released it's full power.

It was a fierce wind surge that mowed down everything, blowing away all of the building from the fifth floor upwards.

Takashi, standing alone on the rubble filled fourth floor, slowly brought down "Byakko". It was over. Now their mission was accomplished. Just when he thought that,

"-----"

"Byakko" suddenly glittered from detecting an enemy.

Takashi doubtfully started to move in the direction of that presence.

And right in front of a smashed window--- He looked down from the very edge of the building's floor.

There he saw two girls running into the west with their backs to him. As they felt Takashi's look, Naruse Mio and the Succubus shortly looked back in their escape.

He didn't know how, but they somehow managed to evade "Byakko's" attack.

---However, Takashi was not shaken.

The speed type he was, he would catch up to them in no time.

Unlike in the restricted space of the building, he could utilize his speed to the max out doors and fight to his heart's content.

So Takashi jumped outside. After he landed on the ground without a sound after jumping off from the fourth floor, he started to go after Mio and Maria with his fastest dash.

In response to the distance between them closing in a flash,

"Damn…!"

Mio released blaze magic as a diversion in her desperation, but Takashi cut all of them down with "Byakko" and was about to close the remaining distance all at once.

"---?"

He was forced to retreat backwards from the sudden shock wave coming from the side. And then,

"…What's the deal?"

He asked the girl, who had stopped him with the spirit sword "Sakuya" in her hand,--- Yuki irritated.

"Attacking me to let Naruse Mio escape… Are you out of your mind, Yuki?"

However, Yuki remained silent. So Takashi directed "Byakko" at her.

"Whatever your reason may be, once you support a devil, you are no longer a comrade--- You are a traitor. Even if it's you, I'll cut you down without mercy."

Upon that, Yuki finally opened her mouth. With a quiet, yet firm voice,

"……..Do as you see fit."

Yuki muttered that.

"Don't tell me… You too forgot about the tragedy five years ago?"

His voice unwantedly trembled. Takashi's irritation changed into clear anger and he glared at her. Upon that,

"…I still remember it. There's no way I would forget. I don't ever want to experience something like that again…"

"Then---"

"But at this rate, the same as five years ago will happen, when I could do nothing, but watch. So this time, I'll protect my precious person and that what he wants to protect."

Because, said Yuki.

"That's the reason I got stronger. I've lived the past five years for that. If I cannot protect Basara--- then there's no point in being a Hero."

That was Nonaka Yuki's steadfast resolve.

"Imbecile…!"

Takashi said so scornfully, then moved--- To defeat the enemy that stood in his way.

As the battle between Yuki and Takashi started behind their backs, Mio and Maria stopped.

What presented themselves in their vision was a falling-out between Heroes.

---However, Mio was not dumbfounded over it.

Because she knows all too well what--- no, whom Nonaka Yuki was fighting for.

And that's why she couldn't ignore it, even if Yuki had no intentions to protect them. She understood her feelings painfully well.

"That idiot---" "---Please wait, Mio-sama."

Mio was about to return, but Maria stopped her.

"That man is after you, Mio-sama. If you return now, you will just be playing into his hands."

"Even so, I can't leave Nonaka behind!"

Mio said emotionally.

"Please calm down. Why did we buy time? We cannot defeat that man right now. Neither can that Nonaka Yuki."

"That's…"

Of course she hadn't forgotten about that. If Mio and Maria were to win this fight, the Hero Tribe would only consider them a greater threat.

To avoid that, they first needed to be victorious over Takashi and the others and show them that Basara could keep Mio in check, hence not posing a threat.

"But when Nonaka's here, that means Basara surely is…"

Mio's voice became sad. Yuki was supposed to have been anxiously watching the fight between Basara and Kurumi.

That she was here now alone meant that her anxiety was already gone.

---Of course, Basara wasn't dead. The Master and Servant Contract would let Mio know if anything were to happen to her Master and when she concentrated, she could feel his presence.

He was alive without a doubt. But she didn't know if he won or not. At least it was unlikely that he was still able to fight right now. Mio inadvertently became gloomy.

"Keep it together, Mio-sama! What are you throwing in the towel for now!"

Maria said vehemently and Mio ducked her head.

"We promised, no, we swore that we would definitely be victorious. The Contract grows stronger from your faith. Yet, you are losing faith in your Master. What for?"

"…But!"

"The situation certainly looks grim, but I am sure that Basara-san has not given up yet. And if he cannot make it here, then please go pick him up. It is a servant's duty to help one's master--- And above all, it is the little sister's duty to help her family, her beloved brother."

And while glancing over to Yuki still fighting Takashi,

"Please go--- We can still make it at this point."

"W- Wait… what about you? You wouldn't---"

Mio inadvertently gulped.

"I will aid in buying some time here until you bring Basara-san back."

Naruse Maria said and looked over her shoulder at Mio with a smile.

"As your retainer, that is my duty--- Yes, I will not let anyone to take that from me."

Part 6

Nonaka Kurumi lent the passed out Basara her lap, albeit reluctant.

"God, why do I…"

Sitting with her legs out to the side on the asphalt, Kurumi muttered displeased.

In the battle earlier, Kurumi had her life rescued by her enemy, Basara.

This wasn't meant to repay him, but he had faced her honestly without any dirty tricks and while he may be an enemy, he saved her life, so she couldn't bring herself to leave him lying on the street.

---However, Kurumi wouldn't have to stay like this for long.

Right after Yuki left, the fierce roaring of an attack could be heard from in front of the station.

That was without doubt an attack from "Byakko" at full power.

Even in the unlikely event that they survived that, they would be no match for Yuki and Takashi together.

This battle should reach its conclusion soon. So she just had to wait for Yuki and Takashi to come pick her up after victory. And in this posture that restricted her movements,

"…………"

Nonaka Kurumi stared at Basara's sleeping face on her lap.

There had been a distance between them when they reunited one hour ago and fought each other fiercely until just now. So Kurumi now took a good look at Basara's face after so many years.

…He has become manly.

Kurumi only knew the ten year old Basara from the <Village>.

It has been five years since then. Basara, now fifteen and in the middle of puberty, has started to turn into an adult man.

But his facial features had hardly changed from before.

It was ever so slightly that she actually realized the change in her childhood friends like Takashi or her sister Yuki, whom she spent the past five years with every day.

Even though it was hard to notice any change when you saw each other every day, since the growth and change of a person took place bit by bit.

Particularly---Yuki. She had changed the most amongst them.

Kurumi couldn't forget Yuki as she stop smiling, sealed away her emotions and desperately trained to get stronger.

Yuki had been a docile child that hated fighting more than anyone, but she kept driving herself into a corner, so much that she seemed to break down, and finally managed to get the spirit sword "Sakuya" assigned to her officially.

Basara must have taken her for someone else after reuniting after five years.

But even though Basara changed physically, when it comes to mental wounds, he hadn't changed all that much, in contrast to Yuki.

Yuki and the others kept suffering at the <Village>, the scene of the tragedy, whereas Basara lived a carefree life in a faraway city.

That was why he could pull something as stupid as protecting the daughter of the previous Devil Lord--- Kurumi couldn't forgive that.

At that moment,

"Eh, hey… what?"

She suddenly saw Basara's expression distort in agony and she panicked.

Yuki's attack that only aimed at making him pass out aside, Basara had received quite the damage during the battle with Kurumi. His organs or brain might even be injured.

In front of the bewildered Kurumi,

"…Uh… Kuh… Grr… Ah….!"

Basara didn't just grimace, he also started to tremble with small shivers--- And then,

"-----"

Kurumi inadvertently gulped on Basara's feeble groaning.

Because she clearly heard him, although he had stop speaking.

---I'm sorry, everyone.

It wasn't an apology to Mio and Maria for not coming to their aid right now. These girls were only two people. Then who did he meant with "everyone"? That much was obvious.

The moment Kurumi came up with the answer--- She was inadvertently taken aback.

"---Can't be."

Kurumi finally realized. The reason Basara didn't change wasn't because he didn't feel anything from that tragedy.

He couldn't change, even if he wanted to.

Most likely, Toujou Basara's time had stopped ever since that tragedy five years ago.

"No way…"

Nonaka Kurumi was at a loss for words. She had thought they were the only ones, who suffered. Still, they could comfort each other, so they were better off.

---But it was different for Basara. Chased out of the <Village>, he started a new life with only Jin here.

However, Jin wasn't in the <Village> at that time five years ago, so even while Basara had a parent that could stand up for him and consider his feelings, no one shared his pain.

Moreover, for Basara it wasn't just a slaughter of his comrade and friends like it was for Kurumi and the others, but it was an irremediable incident caused by his own out-of-control power. His mental wound was way deeper than the others.

Back then Basara had only been ten years old. Even though he was called a genius and had hopes pinned on him, he had still only been a kid. It wasn't something a child could shoulder by himself.

Kurumi and the others always had someone around in the last five years. Sharing pain and sorrow, they could grow stronger together bit by bit. But during that time, Basara had been all alone in an unfamiliar city while the regret seemed to crush him, unable to change.

How much must he have worried? How much must he have suffered? How much must he have cursed himself?

As to express that suffering, Basara reached out his hand into the empty air while grimacing.

Kurumi tightly grabbed that hand. While suppressing the sobbing that boiled within her,

"Basara-oniichan…"

She involuntarily called him like how she used to.

Him, who she adored like a real brother as he was stronger and gentler than anyone. At that moment,

"---Basara!"

A girl came rushing to them out of breath. It was Naruse Mio.

"Wh- Why're you here…!?"

Kurumi was taken aback. She had only expected Takashi or Yuki to come here. She quickly was on guard.

"I have no time to fight with you now, shorty!"

Mio, having reached them, said so loaded with emotion.

"D- Do you really think… I would trust my enemy on their word?"

"Idiot! If I wanted to fight you, I would've launched a magic from afar already!"

Now that she mentioned it, it made sense. Kurumi inadvertently stuttered.

"….Th- Then why…"

"Obviously because it's an emergency!"

Mio shouted irritated at the confused Kurumi. And then,

"Basara, wake up, Basara. C'mon!"

She started to vehemently shake Basara, who was sleeping on Kurumi's lap.

And directly afterwards, Kurumi heard some unbelievable words.

"We need you now--- Nonaka is fighting that Hayase guy!"

Kurumi was speechless for sure now upon Mio's words, but Mio had no time to spare for her.

"Basara, get up! Nonaka and Maria are fighting! The two of them are in danger! Besides, Maria and I can't do it… You said you had defeat 'Byakko' yourself to stop any more fights!"

But no matter how much she shouted, no matter how much she shook his body, Basara didn't wake up.

"It, it's no use… My sister used a sleeping fragrance. He probably won't wake up for another half a day…"

Kurumi said with a bitter voice.

"…So that's how it is…!"

Mio looked grim as she understood the situation.

…At this rate…

All their efforts in fighting up till now would become meaningless. It would still be alright when Yuki and Maria won. But the problem was in case they lost.

That man named Hayase was absolutely faithful to his Hero duties. He surely wouldn't show any mercy to an enemy.

Therefore, Yuki and Maria's defeat would equal death.

When Basara later got to know that such a thing happened while he slept--- his heart, still beset with the nightmare from five years ago, would break completely this time, even if his life was spared.

…I won't let that happen!

She wouldn't let Basara's heart break, nor would she let Yuki and Maria die. Besides, Maria had told her that Basara would never give up. As proof of that:

"…Uh, Kuh…"

Basara suddenly grimaced painfully. He surely was fighting within a dream---

"…A dream?"

Mio suddenly realized. If he was dreaming, he should be in a shallow REM sleep[4]. Since Kurumi told her that he wouldn't wake up for another half a day earlier, Mio had thought for sure that the sleeping fragrance Yuki used had put him into a rather deep slumber.

…Is the drug weakening?

There were a few possible explanations. Like the adrenaline from the fight to the death moments ago or the power up from the strengthening of their Master and Servant Contract.

It was also plausible that he would develop a resistance against the drug from an increased self-healing or metabolism.

In that case,

"…What Nonaka used was a drug of your tribe, right? Didn't you guys have some healing stuff too? If we encourage his metabolism with that, won't the drug leave his body, even if only for a bit?"

Mio suggested that as she remembered that Basara recovered previously due to some drug from Yuki.

"Y- Yeah, we have that kind of drug, but I don't have any… It forces the body and mind to focus on recovering, so if a magic user uses it carelessly, one could end up not being able to use magic while recovering."

Kurumi shook her head, but Naruse Mio refused to give up.

"Then what about an antidote or remedy? You need a medicine to recovery from abnormal conditions that interfere with your concentration for magic, right? Like enforced sleep, hypnosis, poison or paralysis."

Part 7

Yuki picked the fight with Takashi herself--- but it became quite grave for her.

The battle took place on the western side of the barrier. Mio and Maria had fled here to keep Takashi from using "Byakko" at full power.

Their judgment was by no means wrong, but as a result, Takashi considered himself to be in the West and could use "Byakko's" strength as a guardian beast for self-protection.

She unleashed air blades from swinging her sword at mid range and consecutive slashes at close range, but

"---Useless."

All of them were warded off by the wind barrier around "Byakko" and the weapon itself.

And Takashi's attacks, which weaved their way through the gaps of her attacks, were really fast.

"---!"

Yuki was forced to evade with all her might on each attack.

However, Takashi's speed outdid her movements and he attacked her with a sharp thrust.

"Not on my watch!"

Maria advanced on Takashi from the side, but "Byakko's" self-defense easily stopped the surprise attack from Takashi's blind spot to which he shouldn't be able to react.

Afterwards they pressed onto Takashi together with 2 vs.1, but he had no trouble dealing with them.

And then,

"What's wrong? …You're slow."

Yuki looked far from happy on Takashi's indication.

---What troubled Yuki wasn't just the progress of the battle.

She wasn't suffering from an injury or anything. The problem was mental.

Fighting to protect Basara and those he wanted to protect--- She certainly had resolved herself for that.

---However, no matter how great her resolve was, she couldn't be completely get rid of her hesitation.

In front of her eyes was Takashi, an ally, a childhood friend--- and a comrade that survived that tragedy with her.

Nonaka Yuki knew what sacrifices Takashi made in the last five years to get stronger.

I don't want to be paralyzed in front of a tragedy--- This desire made them stronger.

Therefore, Yuki's actions were a betrayal to these comrades. She would take responsibility when the battle was over, but it would still cause her family a lot of problems.

Of course she knew that she shouldn't concern herself with that during a battle. She should only concentrate on fighting right now.

…But

Nonaka Yuki certainly treasured Basara the most--- but not (only/just) him alone.

Her family and comrades were important to her too. She couldn't forget them.

…Besides

Basara chose to fight Yuki and the others to protect Mio. He chose Mio over them.

She knew it was inevitable.

Basara had been a victim of the tragedy too, yet Yuki and the others could only watch as he was chased out of the <Village>.

Yes. Basara hadn't betrayed them---- They had betrayed him.

So it made sense that Basara chose Mio.

…But

Nonaka Yuki knew she shouldn't, but she ended up thinking: What should I do with my past five years--- my endlessly accumulated feelings for him?

---But these feelings of her were only a hindrance to the battle unfolding in front of her.

Her momentary inattention, born of her hesitation, became a fatal opening and Yuki was blown backwards as she parried Takashi's attack with her "Sakuya".

She crashed with her back into a parked car.

"---It's over."

By the time she thought "Damn", "Byakko's" tip was already approaching her.

She couldn't dodge. Knowing that her death was inevitable--- Nonaka Yuki reconciled herself to her fate.

But she didn't reconcile with the battle. If she lost, there was a chance that Basara would die too.

She would never let that happen. So Yuki looked behind Takashi, at Maria.

…Please.

She signalized with her eyes: The moment "Byakko" pierces me, defeat Takashi.

That's the only way to save Basara and your master Mio.

That would only leave Kurumi behind, who couldn't fight anymore due to broken ribs.

Knowing Kurumi's personality, she might try to be reckless, but she would surely lose all will to fight once she gets to know that Takashi killed Yuki.

Moreover, Shiba was forbidden to fight Basara and the girls by the <Village> as he was just an overseer this time.

In other words--- When Maria defeats Takashi after he kills Yuki, this battle would end. Therefore,

"-----"

Yuki closed her eyes. In her final moment, she uttered the name of her dearest person along with a smile.

---Basara. Not a day went by where I didn't think of you.

Even if your feelings are directed at someone else… I loved you more than anyone.

So don't forget me--- In the very moment she said her farewell.

---A shrill metallic noise resounded.

"……Eh?"

Nonaka Yuki looked at what was not an illusion by all means.

She had always seen it in her childhood--- The back of her dearest person.

Unbelievable. He had breathed in so much of the sleeping fragrance.

He was injured as well. He shouldn't wake up for another half a day--- Yet.

That back protected her against Takashi's "Byakko", saving her life that she herself had thrown away already.

Pretty much the same as five years ago, when he fought during the tragedy to save her life.Toujou Basara stood right there.

Part 8

Takashi said to Basara who was in front of him, who stopped "Byakko's" thrust with his Brynhildr.

"You're here---"

It was not a question, but a declarative statement. Basara nodded with "Yeah".

"Takashi… were you going to kill Yuki?"

"She attacked me first."

said Takashi.

"Besides, not fighting is one thing, but she even tried to help the termination target Naruse Mio. She forgot her own mission and sided with the devil. So it's only natural that I take her out as an enemy."

"…You're childhood friends."

"So what? We are Heroes. We protect this world--- This mission takes priority over all emotions. Yuki should know that and so should you."

Takashi declared indifferently, whereas Basara replied with silence and thought.

…Ahh, I see…

He finally understood Jin's feelings from five years ago. This was certainly unbearable.

The mission as a Hero--- Just from these words, one had to give up an important person? That wasn't possible for Basara, not now, nor five years ago. Therefore,

"…Okay. Fine."

At the same time he said so, Basara moved. If words didn't get through, only violence would.

Basara cleared away "Byakko" to the side due to Takashi's momentarily easing and launched a side slash while lowering his body.

Takashi dodged it by jumping backwards, whereas Basara changed into his gear and chased after him. To protect his important people.

---Reality wouldn't go your way just from imagining or wishing.

The initially even battle between Takashi and Basara slowly shifted into Takashi's favor.

"Byakko" was just that powerful. Furthermore, Basara's body was still under some the effect of the sleeping fragrance from Yuki, so he couldn't move as he wanted to. In regards, Takashi's physical abilities had skyrocketed in the last five years.

And not just in power, he even completely outdid Basara in terms of speed, the greatest weapon of a speed type. Basara was one-sidedly pushed into defense while he fully realized how much heart and soul Takashi had put into his training.

…Damn.

His body felt heavy. So did Brynhildr.

Still, Basara didn't throw in the towel while grinding his teeth on his pathetic predicament. He had something to protect now. Something he could not give up on.

Jin, who protected him before, and Mio and Maria, his new family.

---And there was a Hero right now, who tried to protect him, even though he had decided to side with Mio and Maria.

Five years ago, Basara had managed to save her life, but that had been more of a coincidence.

Because he had let go off his consciousness and let <Banishing Shift> go out of control.

But she was different. In the last five years she had become so strong that he didn't recognize her, and she fought for Basara and what he wanted to protect by her own will.

Not just today or the incident with Takigawa the other day. She surely had been fighting throughout the last five years.Basara would protect her--- the girl named Nonaka Yuki for sure this time.

Because she had and always will be an irreplaceable existence to him.

"-----"

So Basara did what was necessary for that.

There was no other way, since there was no point in fighting orderly with his injured body.

Thus, he made a resolve and gave up on one thing.

He abandoned his own fighting style.

---Soon he would win against Basara.

It happened when Takashi's heartbeat raised a bit due to his imminent victory.

Basara's movements suddenly changed.

…What?

At first he thought Basara had run out of stamina, since his breathing had become rough and his movement was wasteful.

But that wasn't the case. Takashi's thrusts started to cut through empty air and sometimes Basara moved faster than his eyes.

---Humans could move faster by eliminating all wasteful movements. To internalize that in body and soul and utilize it in its fullest was the onset and strived goal of a speed type's training.

And only those, who could muster the utmost concentration to eliminate anything wasteful from heart and body to the limit, were able to set foot into the wind domain.

Due to that a fight between speed types consisted of reading each others movements. Because the more effective one got, the simpler the movements at high speed got.

However--- Basara was currently showing movements obviously contradicting that idea.

"You little… Don't screw with me."

Takashi launched a series of thrusts in his anger. But none of it even grazed Basara.

He couldn't believe it. Takashi had used the five years since their separation to train himself, whereas it should have been a negative blank for Basara.

Of course he grew in stature as he was still in his growing period, but five years was a long time---

When training was neglected, one's physical abilities dropped, even if the body itself grew up. It was more than enough time for a genius to turn into an average person.

Despite that--- Right now, Basara was even faster than five year ago.

…Maybe.

Coming up with a possible explanation, Takashi was shocked. Basara presumable didn't materialize Brynhildr in the five years after he was chased out of the "Village", not until he met Naruse Mio.

Because he no longer had a reason to wield a sword--- a reason to fight, since he stopped being a Hero.

…Don't tell me, you…

Basara's movements were absolutely messy, yet he was on pair with Takashi. That was not something possible for someone, who spent his time idly--- That left only one explanation.

Tojou Basara had continued his training.

Even while plagued by the tragedy of the past, the burden of the sin he committed, and without a sword--- He nevertheless had kept fighting these past five (years), just like Takashi and the others.

"---So what!?"

Takashi slashed at Basara with "Byakko".

Okay, Basara might have continued his training. However, it was a fact that he had decided to protect Naruse Mio--- the daughter of the previous Devil Lord and a prospective threat to the world.

Five years after that tragedy, that was Basara's answer.

And Hayase Takashi could not forgive that.

Even if Basara, Jin and Yuki abandoned their mission, Takashi would see his through to the finish.

That was the way he chose after surviving that tragedy.

In the time Takashi attacked once, Basara countered thrice, and launched a series of five attacks and then eight slashes.

Robbing the opponent of his chances to attack--- That was the true worth of Basara the Infinite Slayer.

"Byakko" reacted to Basara's Godspeed attacks, individually from Takashi's judgment.

"Kuh…!"

The half forcefully activated self-defense bereaved Takashi of the option to retaliate.

And in time, even that defense couldn't keep up anymore, resulting in the set-up of a wind barrier.

"Byakko" must have judged Takashi's judgment and movement as too slow to ward off Basara's attack.

It meant that "Byakko" judged Takashi as a hindrance to protect him.

"---No way!"

He couldn't accept it.

So Takashi, flying in a rage, tried to destroy the wind barrier by raising "Byakko" over his head.

Because he wouldn't be able to attack himself like this.

He convulsed. As Takashi was regarding himself to be in the west to have "Byakko's" protection, his action exposed himself to danger.

The mystical guardian beast, protector of the west, was used to bring danger to the west--- Takashi was painfully made aware on his own body what that contradiction would bring about.

The moment "Byakko" touched the wind barrier, a fierce shock-wave erupted and blew Takashi away.

Basara was caught in the shock-wave before him and blown backwards, but he managed to land properly.

"Takashi…!"

He had tried to help Takashi in a haste. However--- he was unable to.

In his field of vision stood a giant white beast. Toujou Basara knew its name.

The mystical guardian beast protecting the west--- Byakko. At that time,

"---Basara!"

Rushing towards him was Mio, who woke him from his slumber and told him about Yuki's crisis.

Of course they needed to help Yuki right away, but Mio had been totally wasted. Not to forget the wounded Kurumi.

So leaving them behind, Basara had rushed here by himself with his Godspeed, but Mio surely couldn't bear to just sit around and wait.

On a closer look, Kurumi was following behind Mio as well. Then,

"Mio-sama, you are alright!"

Maria, who had watched over the fight between Takashi and Basara, regrouped with them too and the four of them focused on Byakko.

It emitted a dreadful aura from its huge body.

"…Wh- What's that? Is that also the doing of that guy Hayase?"

"No, not quite… That isn't Takashi's will. Byakko probably went berserk."

The power sealed in the spear was released and materialized its original form.

"…It's not coming at us."

Maria said with a bewildered voice.

"Because 'Byakko' is a guardian beast. It most likely won't attack us unless it marks us as an enemy."

"An enemy…?"

"I think we're safe as long as we don't attack or carelessly approach it…"

It surely cautioned a range as long as the reach of the original spirit lance. But,

"This is bad… The barrier here is partly constructed with 'Byakko's' power. If we aren't careful, it might come apart."

If that beast went outside--- He didn't even want to think so far. They were in front of the station. A lot of people were outside the barrier.

Normal humans basically couldn't see phenomenon from unusual powers, but "Byakko" was no longer under the control of his wielder Takashi and on a rampage.

If normal humans ended up seeing it, a mass panic couldn't be avoided. And if Byakko marked them as enemies during that commotions, there would be victims amongst the normal humans.

"Wouldn't that tiger vanish if we destroy that spirit lance?" said Mio.

However, Kurumi hastily interfered.

"Are you crazy! It has the concept of a mystical beast engraved in it. If you destroy the spear, it'll free its full power!"

In other words, they had no choice but to somehow defeat that beast. Hence Maria proposed.

"Uhm… Basara-san, how about you use 'that technique' on it?"

He understood what Maria was getting at. But,

"Impossible. I can only invoke "Banishing Shift" as a counter."

He used it before to save Mio when her power was out of control, but he could only activate it, since he used it as a counter against the released power. It wasn't applicable now.

"In short, we have to defeat it upfront… Fine, I'll kill it a hundred times."

Saying so, Mio was about to step forward, but Maria quickly stopped her.

"You cannot, Mio-sama. That tiger surely has erected a tough wind barrier. If you use magic in your current condition, you will not escape unscathed. We have to think of another way!"

"Oh, come on, as if there's such a convenient---"

Mio started talking.

"---No, there is."

Basara said with a calm voice.

"But… you said you can't use 'Banishing Shift'."

"Yeah, there's another way. But it should work if all goes well."

However,

"I need to plunge into its side for it. So we need to destroy the wind barrier at least before---"

Basara declared.

"---Then leave that to me."

A quiet voice volunteered. It belonged to the last person remaining inside the barrier.

The beautiful female Hero that fought to protect Basara--- Nonaka Yuki.

Part 9

Yuki volunteered to take down Byakko's wind barrier.

"Sis…?"

Kurumi raised a flustered voice at her. However, Yuki smiled peacefully at her little sister that tried to stop her,

"-----"

and faced Basara again.

"Let me do it, Basara… I know I can do it with my 'Sakuya'."

Saying so, she called out her spirit sword into her hands.

"… I don't think there's any other way."

Like Maria had said, it was impossible for Mio. The same held true for Kurumi, since she was an Elemental Master and thus disrupted by "Byakko".

It would be possible for Maria, a power type, but (as) a Hard Striker specialized in close combat. It was far too dangerous to let her fight that tiger, whose strength they didn't know, by herself.

Therefore,

"Basara, please… Believe in me."

Yuki said vigorously. Then she just looked Basara in the eyes.

She was believing in Basara--- Therefore, she wanted Basara to believe in her as well. And then,

"………Fine."

Before long, Basara said so with a nod. He believed in Yuki. Hence,

"Thanks…"

Yuki showed a smile, then rushed at Byakko. Upon that,

"----"

At the same time Byakko marked Yuki with his eyes, a dreadful pressure was released from its huge body.

However, Yuki wasn't intimidated. All she felt was--- a shaky delight.

Basara believed in her. She could fight for his sake.

Right now, Yuki felt really glad that she had become stronger.

Now she could finally find meaning in the harsh and painful last five years.

The reason Nonaka Yuki grew stronger--- It surely was for this very moment, for Toujou Basara.

Thus she no longer had any doubts like in the fight against Takashi.

Yuki confronted Byakko at a distance of ten meters.

"Hear me--- 'Sakuya'."

She muttered and at the same time, she swung down her spirit sword from above her head.

At that time, Basara and the others saw a shock-wave that let the atmosphere tremor.

It collided with Byakko's wind barrier and made a loud roaring sound. In light of this terrific destructive power,

"H- Hey… What the? Nonaka is this strong?"

"Oh please, a bit late for that."

Mio became dumbfounded, whereas Kurumi said with a hmpf. While they watched, Yuki started a chain of attacks as the barrier wasn't destroyed with just one attack,

"Sis got the important mission to observe you, the previous Devil Lord's daughter, all by herself after all."

"But still…"

Even Maria couldn't believe it. Byakko had already recognized Yuki as an enemy and tried to go on the offensive, but her endless series of shock-waves didn't allow him to counterattack even once.

"She is obviously stronger than during the battle at the park the other day."

"Naturally. Sis' 'Sakuya' was created from a divine cherry tree, imbued with the power of the sacred mountain Fuji.

There's no way she could show her true power when there was a risk of harming nature."

But inside a barrier, where the surroundings aren't harmed, she could utilize her power to the fullest.

Most likely, the earlier attack that knocked out Basara was part of it too.

…Right. Basara felt a reliability from Yuki's back as she was moving around.

---However, the admiration could wait for later. Basara crouched down and collected himself.

What he was going to unleash now was the attack he used against the giant devil Valgar in their fight one week ago. He calculated the best and shortest route to slash down the enemy and the necessary speed for it. At the moment he finished doing so.

An attack from Yuki finally broke Byakko's wind barrier. Therefore,

"-----"

Toujou Basara converted all his power into speed and took action.

After she destroyed his barrier, Yuki saw Byakko changing his attitude.

It responded to her attacks by moving volatilely after drawing back its body.

True to the motto: Attacking (offence) is the best defense. Byakko pulverized her shock-waves by ramming them

"-----"

and charged straight at Yuki.

Baring its sharp fangs, it approached with its towering huge body.

---But its fang didn't reach Yuki.

Because before that, a wind rushed past right besides her from behind.

Nonaka Yuki clearly saw a certain back within the wind. At that time.

The mystical guardian beast of the west - Byakko's huge body was torn into piece.

Part 10

After defeating the materialized Byakko and retrieving the spirit lance, Basara and the girls went over to Takashi.

Takashi had received the attack from the rampaging "Byakko" upfront, but he was alive and regained consciousness before long.

Seeing his enemies and allies together, he surely realized his defeat.

"……..Kill me."

While biting on his lip, he squeezed these words out.

"The 'Village' ordered your death and it's my mission to carry that out. As long as I live, I'll keep coming after you."

Basara shook his head to Takashi.

"There's no way I can do that."

"---Afraid of turning the whole Tribe against you?"

"No. I just don't want to kill you… We're childhood friends."

Basara explained, whereas Takashi sneered.

"So you can't kill a childhood friend? …Don't screw with me! Amongst those you erased five years ago, there were numerous childhood friends of ours!"

"That's…"

Basara inadvertently cast his gaze down on these words.

"…What's wrong? C'mon, erase me with that cursed technique of yours. It should be an easy feat for you, who forgot about the tragedy and sided with the Devil Lord's daughter."

Saying so, Takashi tried to lash out at him, but someone moved against Takashi.

It was a girl that had watched Basara's and Takashi's exchange from the side like the others--- Mio.

Mio wordleslys got between them and slowly slapped Takashi on the cheek.

"---Bitch!"

Takashi's initial surprise immediately turned into fury.

"Fine, bring it on! I'll kill you a hundred times!"

But Mio declared fearlessly.

"Forgot about the past? Don't be stupid! You don't know how much Basara still suffers and keeps having nightmares, so don't spout such nonsense… There's no way he could forget what you guys can't! Or are you thinking you guys are the only ones suffering!?"

"Say what…"

"M- Mio-sama… I can relate, but please calm down."

"Let go of me. I have to smack this idiot another one!"

Mio tried to draw closer to Takashi, but Maria somehow pulled her apart (away).

Takashi looked at these two, whereas Basara declared to him.

"Takashi… If you still are after Mio, after us, then I'll stop you as often as it takes. This is the path I have chosen by myself, not as a Hero."

Whatever happened, he would not back down from it.

"But I'll never kill you. I'll keep shouldering the past and your current resentment."

That's right, Basara thought. He could never forget, nor would he ever.

He wasn't turning his back on the "past", he was shouldering it. Looking at the "future", he lived in the "present".

Sometimes stopping, sometimes turning around, but still moving on. After all,

"Even my 'Banishing Shift' can't erase my past."

"……………."

On his words, Takashi bit his lips and looked down. At that time.

"---Now then, are you done talking?"

Suddenly a bright voice came from behind them. Turning around, there stood Shiba Kyouichi.

"No way… How did you get inside the barrier?"

Kurumi asked dumbfounded, whereas Shiba shrugged his shoulders.

"'Byakko' constructed half of it, then rampaged and even materialized. As a result of depleting most of its power, the barrier weakened, so it was easy to enter."

He laughed.

"Okay--- The battle is settled, so let's go back when you're done talking, you three."

"Are you out of your mind? The elders set Naruse Mio as a termination target. Our mission isn't over until we kill her. That's why they even permitted me to use 'Byakko'---"

"About that, they withdrew it. We are to return at once. That's an official decision by the 'Village'."

"---Is that true, Shiba-san?"

Basara inadvertently tried to confirm, whereupon Shiba nodded with "Yeah".

"Because you guys covered for Takashi letting 'Byakko' go out of control. The barrier could have broken and caused victims amongst humans. To begin with, that girl was changed to a termination target because there were signs of the inherited power from Wilbert awakening, but she herself hasn't harmed anyone yet."

Thus,

"Killing her under these unreasonable conditions would just bring about 'disgrace'. Furthermore, she most likely hosts an incredible power. If we are careless, we might lose the protection and favor of the spirits and gods contracted to the 'Village'. Even the elders know that's bad."

"Impossible… That can't be…"

After hearing his explanation, Takashi said so, still in disbelief---whereupon the atmosphere suddenly became tense.

Everyone inadvertently swallowed their saliva.

"Didn't you hear me, Takashi? I said it's over. I don't care about your feelings or sentiments. Obey the orders from the 'Village' without objections. I still won't say anything about shutting me out of the barrier, but if you act any more shameful--- then I'll smash your stupid obstinacy along with you."

"……."

Takashi showed a frustrated expression to these words, but before long, he left the circle of Basara and the others and lined up next to Shiba. Then Shiba finally relaxed his expression and the tense atmosphere slackened. And then,

"Okay, Kurumi-chan and Yuki-chan, come with me--- We're going home."

On his words, first Kurumi headed over to Shiba, then Yuki.

"W- Wait a minute, Shiba-san. Yuki is---"

The moment Basara tried to go after them, Shiba emitted a pressure that made you gulp. And then,

"---Stay put, Basara. I want to remain an overseer until the end today."

Shiba declared with a cold smile and faintly opened eyes.

"…As if such a threat would…"

Basara tried to act, even while he knew what it meant turning Shiba against him.

Nevertheless, he didn't want to let Yuki go. However,

"Basara… stop…"

Yuki shook her head at him.

"I'm fine. I had planned to return to the 'Village' once the fight was over. I have to take responsibility for what I did… I can't cause Kurumi or my father any trouble."

"There you have it. If you don't let Yuki-chan return, you will ruin the hard-earned consent. It'll just worsen your situation unnecessarily. Everyone'll become unhappy when you're swayed by momentary emotions, you know?"

"-----"

Basara fell silent frustrated and Yuki smiled quietly.

"Thanks, Basara. It was only for a short while--- but I was really happy to see you again."

These words marked the farewell between Toujou Basara and Nonaka Yuki after a reunion in five years.

Basara and the girls could only watch Yuki leave with Shiba in silence.

Future Possibilities

Part 1

The chime heralded the end of the class.

Stand up, Bow--- Usually the class representative was in charge of this routine.

But today, the assistant class representative of class 1-B did all of it.

Because the class representative, Nonaka Yuki was absent.

Knowing the reason for it, Naruse Mio looked at the front most seat in her window row.

Yuki's seat that has been vacant since this morning. Then Mio looked at Basara's back sitting in his own seat. He, like Mio, was looking at Yuki's seat.

"-----"

Mio quietly averted her eyes from Basara's back.

---Mio and the others had fought against Yuki and the others three days ago, on Friday last week.

After the fight had ended, Yuki obeyed the man called Shiba and left with the other two.

To take responsibility for betraying her comrades in her desire to protect Basara.

Therefore she wasn't at school today. And she most likely would never come again.

…After all.

Yesterday, Mio and the others had paid a visit to Yuki's mansion. They knew she wouldn't be there. Nevertheless, they couldn't sit tight and their legs brought them there on reflex.

However--- They witnessed something unbelievable there. People were carrying Yuki's stuff out of her room. Moreover, they weren't moving guys, but waste collectors.

They quickly asked the men and the manager of the mansion about the circumstances and they were told that Yuki had cancelled the contract for the room and asked for the disposal of her remaining stuff.

When the gang returned home absent-minded, there was a single mail for Basara.

It was from Yuki. But inside it wasn't a letter, but the key to the Toujou house. When the girls asked him about it, he told them that he had handed Yuki a spare key before the fight. And it was returned now.

The three of them realized then that Yuki would never come back here.

In the not so distant future, the school would surely be informed of her dropping out.

Seeing how quickly she moved out of the mansion, it was possible that she already got all the paperwork for it done and that they, the students, just weren't informed about it yet.

…Nonaka.

Yuki chose to do all that by her own accord.

But, if Mio had never met Basara, if he had never decided to protect Mio---then Yuki wouldn't have had to betray her comrades.

And if Basara and Yuki reunited before he met Mio, then Mio might have faced Basara as an enemy as well, not just Yuki.

That was the only difference between Mio and Yuki. Thinking about that, Mio cast her eyes down at her seat.

"…Are you okay, Naruse-san?"

Suddenly, a considerate voice called out to her. On a look, there stood two female classmates of her right next to her seat: Aikawa Shiho and Sakaki Chika. Therefore,

"Eh…m, what do you mean?"

"You have been aloof the whole time today… Even now, you were spacing out."

Aikawa gave Mio, who quickly tried to smooth it over, a wry smile. And Sakaki asked.

"Does it have to with Toujou-kun and Nonaka-san?"

"W- Why…?"

"Toujou-kun is in the same state and Nonka-san is absent today."

"Uh…"

There had been a commotion about Yuki clinging to Basara on his first day here and since then, the others considered the three to be in an eternal triangle.

"From you three, one is absent and the other two have a gloomy look, you know. Of course we will think that something has happened."

"That's… not it, really."

Mio hemmed and hawed on their pointer.

"Really~?" "Suspicious…"

Aikawa's and Sakaki's bantering gave her a doubtful look.

However, it wasn't harassment to find out about their relationship out of curiosity.

They surely wanted to cheer up the depressing looking Mio.

---Mio treated everyone at school the same.

But since her life was targeted by the current Devil Lord faction, she had made it a principle not to make any friends in particular, so they wouldn't get dragged into anything.

Nevertheless, she enjoyed talking or spending time with people her age and couldn't reject someone, who took the initiative to befriend her.

Thus she usually ate lunch together with Aikawa and Sakaki and often was together with them during non-classroom lessons like physical education.

Those two were the only ones Mio would call friends after getting into high school. Then,

"Well… if anything does worry you, you can talk to us anytime."

"Yeah, as trivial as it may be. You can always call me without reservation."

Saying so, Aikawa Shiho and Sakaki Chika grinned.

"I mean--- We're friends!"

Part 2

In the end, he finished classes vacantly today.

Basara had left the school together with Mio, but they didn't go straight home, but rather dropped by a certain place.

The place, where they had fought Takashi, Kurumi--- and Yuki: The forecourt of the station.

It was nearly evening. Not many people passed through there. However, in about 2-3 hours, working hours would end and the place would become lively with people going home.

"It was only ten days ago…"

He had met up with Yuki here and together they went into the city to shop. The unfamiliar place made him lose his bearing, but Mio and Maria joined them midway and they had a great time together.

"---Basara?"

When Basara looked absentminded in front of her, Mio worriedly pulled on his sleeve from beside.

Instead of replying to her, he mumbled quietly.

"…I wanted to protect her."

Only that. But Mio next to him swallowed her saliva. Then she removed her hand from his sleeve and took his hand. Basara squeezed back and started to walk on slowly before long.

On their way home, neither Basara, nor Mio spoke a word. Shortly thereafter--- they reached their house.

"We're home…"

When they entered while announcing their return, a delicious smell greeted them at the front door. Maria was most likely preparing dinner. Mio went up to the second floor to get changed, whereas Basara headed for the living room.

After he opened the door and went inside, his feet took him straight into the kitchen. While he opened the fridge and took the milk out,

"Smells good… What're you cooking today?"

he asked casually, to which

"…A special beef stew."

a calm voice different from Maria's replied. In response to this gentle voice,

"----?"

Basara turned around in confusion. Because he knew whom this voice belonged to.

There was no doubt. And the girl he expected stood there.

"Yuki…"

While he widen his eyes in surprise, Toujou Basara spoke out her name dumbfounded.

The name of his childhood friend, whom he resigned himself to never see again.

"Why are you---" "I came to take responsibility."

He asked beyond his belief, whereas Yuki said without delay.

"No, but…"

For that very reason, Yuki was taken back to the "Village" by Shiba. And it should've been the conclusion of the battle. In fact, she had quickly moved out of her mansion. Then,

"The 'Village' changed Naruse Mio back to a Surveillance Target. Due to that, an observer was needed again."

He comprehended that.

But Yuki, reasons aside, defied the "Village's" order and betrayed her comrades. Not that she would get executed, but imprisonment was more than reasonable.

Or at least, it was unlikely that she was allowed to leave the "Village". Despite that, Yuki was right here now--- On top of that, with Basara and Mio, the reason for her betrayal. So Basara was bewildered. "Basara… The incident is treated like it never happened to begin with. Therefore---"

"……Ah."

Toujou Basara finally understood it. Takashi and the others had come here because Mio had become a Termination Target. As a result, "Byakko" went out of control during the battle and jeopardized the surroundings. The best way to cover up that fact was to undo the decision to turn Mio into a Termination Target, which started all this.

Also--- If that battle was treated as non-existent, then everything that occurred there was dealt with as non-existent, not just the rampage from "Byakko". Including Yuki's betrayal.

Matters were wind back to the time, when Mio was a Surveillance Target.

To one week ago, where Yuki was observing Mio. To the day, where they were all together. However,

"Are you saying the 'Village', the elders turned a blind eye…?"

Basara was dumbfounded over the "Village's" kind decision, whereas Yuki shook her head.

"I don't know… At first, I should've been imprisoned for betraying the 'Village'. But yesterday, everything was suddenly dealt with as if it never happened."

"Why so suddenly…"

Yuki said to Basara, who still couldn't believe it, with a calm voice.

"Kurumi told me--- that Jin-san called the elders."

"---My dad?"

Basara was surprised to hear Jin's name out of the blue. Ever since opposing the decision regarding Basara five years ago, Jin hated the "Village" and elders' guts.

It would be one thing if they contacted him, but Jin would never ever get in contact with them on his own accord.

Then why? ---That was only obvious.

Basara remembered what Jin told him after it became apparent that they would fight Yuki and the others.

"I'll take responsibility. It doesn't matter that the opponent has 'Byakko'--- Go beat him up."

Right. Jin had certainly said that. Basara had thought for sure that it meant that Jin himself would fight with them if the situation called for it. But that wasn't the case.

Then the idea to treat everything like it never happened came from Jin.

Basara didn't know how he made the elders agree to it. It was possible that he threatened them in some kind of way, too.

Either way--- Toujou Jin helped Basara from afar, with a method only possible to (for) him. As Basara realized this,

"……."

a shiver ran through every fibre of his body.

"…Basara?"

The girl in front of him looked up to him puzzled.

She was his precious childhood friend, whom he wished to protect. The only Hero in this world that would take their side. So Basara couldn't hold himself back anymore.

He high-handedly pulled Yuki closer and embraced her. Yuki winced; surprised in his arms for a moment, but Basara paid it no mind and squeezed her tighter. To get a good feel of Nonaka Yuki's existence.

It was a wild hug based simply on emotion. But Yuki showed no signs of feeling pain. On the contrary, she hugged Basara back. ---And then, the two of them embraced each other for a while.

As he had finally confirmed Yuki as real, Basara let go of her and inadvertently gulped.

Because Yuki's face with closed eyes was right in front of him.

"Basara…"

It was a total surprise attack. Yuki's lips reached out for Basara's unguarded lips.

"---COUGH"

Before their lips touched, a cough suddenly came from right beside them.

When he looked startled in that direction, there stood Mio, now dressed in casual clothes.

"It's a reunion after we thought you would never see her again, so I kindly kept silent for a while, but what are you getting carried away for and entering a kiss scene?"

"N- No, well…!"

Mio said so with twitching cheeks, so Basara quickly tried to separate from Yuki.

However, he couldn't. Because Yuki had entwined her arms around his back.

Then she tightly clung to Basara as to show off to Mio.

"Naruse-san… Sorry, but Basara and me are busy right now. Can you come back later?"

"Are you stupid!? Don't be so imprudent in someone else's house!"

Besides, said Mio.

"How did you even get inside when you returned your spare key? Moreover, you're using the kitchen as you please… I'll call the cops for trespassing."

"Yeah--- How did you get inside, Yuki?" "I was let in." "By whom?"

When Mio asked without a moment's delay, the door opened with a clatter and the culprit entered the living room.

"Excuse my delay, Yuki-san… Oh my, Basara, Mio-sama, when did you get here?"

"Maria!? Don't tell me you let her in!?"

"Eh? Huh? Should I have not done that…?"

Maria was stunned by Mio's anger.

"Basara-san was quite depressed about Yuki-san's disappearance… So I thought he would be happy. To surprise you, I even hid her shoes and we waited for your return."

"No one asked you to…!"

"But--- You have been concerned about her the whole time too, Mio-sama."

"Th- That's…"

When Mio turned red unconsciously, Yuki asked Maria while blinking in surprise.

"Really?"

"Yes. She was as worried about you as Basara-san."

"…..Oho."

"Ah, what's with that smirk! It was only a bit of sympathy because I felt sorry for you! But now I know that you're alright. Get out of here at once!"

"Calm down, Mio-sama. She once saved you when you were in a pinch, so do not be so cold. She was even so kind to even cook for us."

"Cook… Speaking of, what were you doing then?"

"I was borrowing Basara-san's computer for a bit."

Saying so, Maria moved to the back of the living room. Then she turned on the TV and conjured something up out of nothing.

"What's with that CD…?"

"This? Ufufuh. It is my greatest treasure. I want to grant Yuki-san the favour of watching it as my gratitude for saving Mio-sama. Since we are all here, let us watch it together."

After putting the CD into the player on the side of the TV, Maria cheerfully picked up the remote and changed the channel. And--- in the next moment.

"Ahh, Yahn, Hah… Mm, Broth- Brother… Mm, Fuah!"

Along with a moaning voice, the screen was filled out with Mio as she showed an enchanted expression while Basara sucked on her big breasts that were covered in maple syrup.

Maria was in a good mood, whereas the others became inadvertently speechless.

"Please take a look at Mio-sama's lewd face and lascivious breasts! You definitely need a blue-ray format for this! Viva la HD! Long live Super Hi-Vision!"

"….KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA---!"

Mio raised a scream so loud that it counted as neighborhood nuisance, snatched the remote from Maria at Godspeed and quickly pressed the stop button.

"Ah, Mio-sama, what are you doing? We were not even at the good part yet."

"What the poke is wrong with your head!? Actually, when did you record this!"

"From the very beginning, of course! The first subjugation is an indispensable family event that needs to be recorded, even more so than the sport or arts festival. Do you think I would miss out on recording such an important memory?"

"That only applies to you succubus!!"

"No way… Then what about your first sex?"

"There's no way I'll let you record that!!!"

Mio wrung Maria's neck while she shouted.

"….Basara, 'dat scene?"

Yuki, who had been silent so far, looked at him with a glazed look. Moreover, her accent appeared.

"Well, that…"

There was no way he could tell her that they did that to increase their strength before the battle with Yuki and the others.

"………"

When Basara was at a loss for an answer, Yuki squinted her eyes and suddenly started to undress.

"H- Hey…!"

As she heard Basara's panicked voice,

"Hey!? What're you doing, Nonaka!"

Mio came rushing over while still strangling Maria. Then hell broke loose.

"Get stuffed, Naruse-san. I'll have Basara do the same to me."

"Then I will get the camera."

"Give it a rest already, Maria, or I'll kill you a hundred times!"

"Gimme a sec, Basara. I'll take everything off."

"I told you not to strip!"

"Basara, where's the maple syrup?"

"No, Yuki-san, you have such white skin, so chocolate sauce would be better."

With such an exchange from the three girls in front of him, Basara chose to---

Part 3

"So… You couldn't cope with it and ran away? You're such a wuss, Basacchi."

"…..Don't be stupid."

Basara replied totally exhausted to Takigawa's criticism.

They were at a hamburger shop close to the state road.

When Basara had ridden his bicycle aimlessly in a strategic retreat, he happened to encounter Takigawa by chance.

As he had to speak him anyway, the two of them went to this shop.

That said, Basara had only ordered a drink. Yuki's beef stew was waiting for him at home. He was already guilty of fleeing the place, so when he ate out on top of that, his life would be in danger.

Takigawa on the other hand was munching on the fries he had ordered.

"I feel ya, bro… As if Naruse Mio and her succubus weren't enough already, you also have to live together with Nonaka from now on."

Right. To his surprise, Yuki would live together with them from now on. She had mentioned it during her quarrel with Mio, but apparently she didn't just say it in the heat of the moment.

Seemingly Jin also suggested that Yuki should live together with Basara and the girls during his negotiations with the elders, and the elders agreed as it was more convenient for Yuki to observe Mio from the same house and she knew about her identity anyway.

The Toujou household still had an empty room, so there was no problem with physical space. If anything, the problem would be Basara's inner peace, which faded when he imagined Yuki and Mio quarreling like earlier.

No, the latter one was surely more pressing.

"Well, enough about me… What about you? Everything alright? I think you told me that a troublesome fellow showed up besides the new observer."

"Mh? Well, for now it is…"

Takigawa said with a shrug of his shoulders.

"She got what she came for and saw something quite interesting, so she went back to report."

"Something interesting--- our battle?"

On the day of the battle, Takigawa had called to tell him that he with company would observe their battle. And if Mio were to be in danger, they would interfere, killing Yuki and the others if necessary.

Takigawa answered Basara's question with "Yeah".

"Remember how Naruse Mio was about to eat a full-power blow from the spirit lance during the fight? Well, in the end she was fine, even if the upper part of the building was blown away."

"Don't tell me… you had your hands in that?"

"No. It was her own strength."

"It was? But I don't think she could---"

Midway in his sentence, Basara suddenly realized something.

She could. There was just one way for her to ward off a full-power attack from "Byakko". Then,

"---Yep. You guys haven't noticed, but Naruse herself hasn't either…. At that time, she activated the inherited power from Wilbert for just a moment."

Takigawa said in a matter of fact tone.

"Actually, the fellow, who watched the battle together with me, put up a barrier in front of Naruse to protect her back then. Although there was your general barrier in place, she managed to do so with her power anyway. But Naruse's graviton field barrier repelled both my fellow's barrier and the attack from the spirit lance.So she analyzed it calmly instead of getting flustered. It looks like Naruse is awakening Wilbert's power bit by bit."

"And that's the interesting something, huh…"

Basara said groaning, whereas Takigawa shook his head with "No".

"Naruse's awakening was still within her prediction. Another matter piqued her interest."

At this point, he lowered his voice.

"Basacchi--- You used that banishing skill once, right? She witnessed that, too, how you erased not only the already activated magic, but also the channel to the spirit. Around now, she's informing her master in the Demon Realm about Naruse and you."

"……..I see."

Takigawa had warned him beforehand that they would be watching--- Yet, he used "Banishing Shift" on an emotional whim and alarmed the present devil from the current Devil Lord faction.

Realizing his mistake, Basara bit his lips. Then suddenly,

"? Wait a sec, Takigawa… Who is she reporting to again?"

He had felt something out of place in Takigawa's words. The vast power from Wilbert that Mio inherited was sought after by the boss of the current Devil Lord faction--- The new Devil Lord that succeeded Wilbert. Or so it should be.

Despite that, Takigawa used the restricting words "her master".

What was the meaning of that? ---A bad feeling befell him.

"Tell me, Takigawa… Who was that troublesome fellow that watched the battle together with you?"

In response to Basara's question,

"Her name is Zest… She's a retainer from Zolgear, the one that killed Naruse's parents."

After that, Takigawa Yahiro spoke about the unavoidable future in a quiet tone.

"Be careful--- Zolgear hasn't given up. He'll come to take Naruse."

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イラスト担当の大熊猫介です。ども！
今回澪ちゃん　イヤン♥アハーン♥　な絵ばかり
だったので　あとがきにて凛々しいお姿をば。。。
でもきっと3巻でもイヤン♥アハーン♥なんでしょう、きっと（○´∀`○）

大熊猫

References

1. ↑ Byakko means White Tiger and is one of the four Chinese constellations
2. ↑ Name of the Capital during the Heian Period, now known as Kyoto
3. ↑ The Chinese have the "Five Cardinal Points" with an extra direction called the center
4. ↑ Rapid eye movement sleep. A stage of sleep with random movement of the eyes.

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